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[PRICE ONE PENNY.]



["DO YOU MEAN THAT BASIL COURtenay IS ENGAGED?"]

**EILEEN'S ROMANCE.****CHAPTER XI.**

THERE are some people who possess in a marvellous degree the gift of hiding their feelings. Prudent and convenient as it is to have this marvellous faculty, for my part my heart always goes out more readily to those who have it not.

I don't mean, for an instant, we should expose our griefs and joys to the most indifferent acquaintance; but I do say and feel that those who are able to hide their sentiments completely—those who seem, too, to see nothing it pleases them not to see, having in gaining this power lost a something of candour and sincerity that nothing can restore.

Eileen Desmond had not the strange faculty of which we speak. She was distressed, troubled, and alarmed at Maude's unexpected return; and though she said no word of her feelings, there was a reluctance in her greeting, a touch of constraint in her manner

nothing could hide, and which must have been perfectly apparent to her wideawake half-sister; but Maude showed no signs of perceiving it.

She affected to think Eileen must be delighted at her presence, and quite ignored the coldness of her welcome.

"Come and help me unpack, you dear child!" she said, caressingly. "I have a hundred things to tell you. Did you get my telegram?"

"No telegram has come. Papa and I thought you were going to stay with the Ernests till after Christmas!"

Miss Desmond shook her head.

"I should like to have done so, but it was impracticable. I will tell you all about it when we are upstairs."

Eileen almost mechanically followed her to her room—the state apartment of the house, which Miss Desmond had taken for herself as a matter of course. As she walked upstairs Eileen reflected possibly Maude's sudden return might have nothing to do with Henry Marsden.

She had better listen to all her sister had to

say before she mentioned her unwelcome guest.

"And you are surprised to see me?" asked Maude, flinging herself on a couch, and letting Eileen kneel down and unfasten her travelling trunk.

"Very much, indeed. From your letters I thought you and Mrs. Westwood were quite located at the Towers!"

"We were very happy there. Delightful people, those kind Ernests: but you see Eileen there was a drawback. Bob's attentions became quite too evident!"

Eileen opened her eyes.

"Do you mean he proposed to you?"

"He did that about a dozen times a day," returned Maude, carelessly; "but it grew necessary to give him a decided answer. I told him, with his instability of character, I could not think of accepting him on such a short acquaintance. We are both to be quite free till Easter, and then he is to speak again. Mr. and Mrs. Ernest are delighted at what they call my disinterestedness, and say they will welcome me as their own child. Meanwhile, the affair is to be kept a perfect secret,

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and both Bob and I are entirely free. You understand now, I suppose, why I have come home?"

"I think so. It wants nearly five months to Easter, and you must see if you can find any one grander or richer than young Mr. Ernest cliff; if not, you will marry him!"

Maude bit her lip.

"You talk like a little savage. Don't you know that if portionless girls like we are accepted a man at once, everyone would say it was for his money!"

"That wouldn't matter. But, Maude, let us talk of something else. How is Lady May?"

"Very well, I believe!"

"Haven't you seen her lately?"

"Not for more than a week. There has been a terrible commotion at Courtenay Hall. Lady May went home to her parents without a word to Lady Constance or Sir Bryan, and actually took her cousin with her. They came home from a wedding, and actually found the girls gone!"

"What girls, Lucy?"

"You silly child! Lucy is married, and with her husband. This was the younger sister, Dolly!"

"And why did May take her away?"

Maude shook her head.

"I have no idea. She had been ailing ever since Lucy's wedding, and Lady May declared she wanted a change. The Courtenays were awfully angry at first. However, it soon blew over. They are too poor to afford the luxury of quarrelling with their rich relatives."

"And Mr. Courtenay?"

She looked fixedly on the ground as she put the question. She felt she could not face Maude's eyes.

"Basil! Oh, he is back with his regiment. I suppose his will be the next wedding!"

She looked at her sister, but Eileen's head was bent over the trunk she was unpacking.

Lady Constance had set her heart on his marrying his cousin; but it seems Lady May declined the honour. However, there is a very pretty girl, whose father's estate joins Courtenay Hall, and it seems the young couple made up the match at Lucy's wedding, when Miss Peyton was a bridesmaid."

"Do you mean that Basil Courtenay is engaged?"

"By no means! Nothing has been announced as yet; but I am quite sure he means to marry Laura Peyton. She is a pretty little thing—not very unlike you, Eileen—and he must marry money. She is an only child; and, besides, the Grange will come in for a very pretty fortune."

Eileen's fingers were shaking. She did not believe the cruel tale, but she did believe that Laura Peyton was the wife selected for Basil by his family; and that but for herself he might have fallen in with their views. An only child, a pretty little thing, with an estate joining the Hall, and a handsome fortune! Surely this was a partner more worthy of Basil than the penniless daughter of a forger?—a man who might soon be a convict?

"What have you been doing with yourself, Eileen? You look like a little white ghost! Have you been moped to death since I went away?"

"I have a bad headache," said Eileen, gently. "I daresay it makes me look ill. I was lying down half the afternoon."

"You do look dreadful!" said Maude, frankly. "Why, what have you been about to get headaches? You never had them in Boulogne."

"I wish we had stayed in Boulogne. Maude, I think I would give anything in the world if my grandfather had lived, and we had never come to this horrible place."

"Poor Desmondville! How has it offended you? You used to stand up for it most vehemently when I called it *triste*!"

"I don't mind the dulness, but—"

Maude watched her half ironically.

"My dear Eileen, it's no use trying to deceive me. Something has happened. You may as well tell me what. You look as if you had been crying. Has his lordship resolved to mend his fallen fortunes by a third marriage? I declare I never thought of that before. It would not be a bad idea."

"How can you talk like that?" cried Eileen, fairly roused. "I am perfectly miserable, but I don't expect you to feel for me. I believe, Maude, that sweet and gentle as you look, you are utterly incapable of love or pity."

"Quite wrong, my dear. I pity a good many people very sincerely, myself amongst them. Now, what ails you? Have you found out the truth of my warning, that your father is not immaculate?"

But the girl's loyal heart was faithful, even then.

"It's not that, Maude. I may as well tell you, for you are sure to find it out. There is a gentleman staying here. He came a fortnight ago."

"Well," said Maude, gently, "unless you shut me up in my own room and condemn me to lonely meals, I should most certainly have found out the visitor's existence. Who is he?"

"A Mr. Marsden."

"And you don't like him? Why not?"

"I never said I disliked him."

"I can read it in your voice."

"He knew papa a great many years ago before I was born. I don't know if he has any profession, but he is very rich."

"Which means, in your estimate, he has five hundred a year. How old is he?"

"He is forty-two. I think he is rich! He told me whatever he touched turned to gold."

"What a charming man! And what induced his lordship to be so hospitable?"

"I believe Mr. Marsden was at York, and wrote himself to propose the visit. I can't bear him!"

"So I imagined. But why? Is he vulgar?"

"Not in the least."

"Uneducated?"

"No. He is good-looking, and has very polished manners—but I am afraid of him."

"Well, I am not," said Maude, coolly. "So I think, instead of this thick travelling dress, I will put on my black lace in his honour. Take it out of the box carefully, please Eileen. It is getting late."

"You will look charming in that!" said Eileen. "And, Maude, if you don't care for young Mr. Ernest cliff, don't you think you might be nice to Mr. Marsden? I am sure he will admire you."

Maude looked her full in the face.

"Evidently he admires you, and in your generosity you wish to resign him to me. Merci, my dear, but I don't care about your discarded suitors."

Eileen made one last effort.

"I can't explain it to you, and perhaps there will be no need for you ever to know; but, oh! Maude, don't offend him. More depends on it than you can dream of. If you anger Henry Marsden an awful calamity will fall on us all—on papa first, and through him, on us."

"Fudge!"

But when she was left alone the beauty reflected there might, after all, be something in the warning. At least, she might as well be gracious to the stranger.

She came downstairs in good time, received her father's greetings, and plunged at once into the matter.

"Papa, who is Mr. Marsden?"

"A friend of my younger days," replied Lord Desmond, quickly, "who has looked me up in this dull retreat."

"Is he in love with Eileen?"

"What, has she told you?"

"Only that she hates him!"

"Maude," said her father, in a strangely moved tone, "you are a woman of the world, and understand things better than your poor little sister. He will settle two thousand a

year on Eileen for her personal use, and leave her fifty thousand at his death! It is a splendid chance for a penniless girl."

"And what is he?"

"He was originally in a merchant's office. He dabbled on the Stock Exchange, and had ridiculous luck. Here he comes. Remember, Maude, I look to you."

Miss Desmond was favourably impressed in the woer. Personally, she much preferred him to Bob Ernest cliff, a trifle hard perhaps, a little too decided in manner, but a husband no girl need be ashamed of, and whose notions on the subject of pin money were most generous.

"I am so glad to meet you, Mr. Marsden. I hope we shall be good friends," and she smiled into his face as Eileen had never done.

"We had better go in to dinner, Maude," said Lord Desmond, blandly. "Eileen will not come down; she has sent word her head is too bad."

Miss Desmond kept the conversational ball rolling well during dinner. When she rose to retire she gave an arch glance at Mr. Marsden, and said demurely,

"I suppose I shall not see either of you in the drawing-room as Eileen is away? I shall have coffee there at nine."

What she expected happened. Lord Desmond was left alone over his wine, and Mr. Marsden very soon followed her.

"I want to ask you a question," he said, abruptly. "Don't be offended; but did your sister send for you?"

"Eileen?" and Maude laughed heartily. "Why, her look of dismay when she saw me was amusing, if it had not been a little disappointing. Oh, don't make any mistake, Mr. Marsden, Eileen is not fond of me. Papa made a spoilt child of her, and so in consequence I represent the three P's, Propriety, Prudence, and Prejudice, and am honestly disliked in consequence."

"Then she does not confide in you?"

"Not willingly; but as I deemed my duty to look after her, I generally find out for myself the things she does not tell me!"

"As for instance—?"

"Perhaps you will be offended?"

"Oh, no!"

"Then I believe that you have asked her to be your wife? The blushes which accompanied your name led me first to suspect it, and my father dropped a hint too."

"You are quite right, Miss Desmond. I mean to marry Eileen, and I want you to help me!"

"And yet you accused me just now of having returned home at her entreaty."

"She told me to day she wished you had been here, then I should certainly have fallen captive to your charms. I fully admit their power," he added, graciously, "but my fate was fixed when I first entered this room. I am a sober, middle-aged man, Miss Desmond, and should have outlived any romantic notions long ago, but I will confess I fell in love with your sister at first sight."

"And—?"

"Question for question—how much do you know?"

"Nothing," said Maude, frankly, "except—remember you asked for it—I think she is afraid of you. She seems to fancy, foolish little girl, if we offend you, some dire calamity will fall on the Desmonds."

"You are not romantic, Miss Desmond?"

"Not the least in the world!"

"And you think money a desirable thing?"

"The most desirable in life."

"Then I think you will understand the position, and advise your sister aright. I will put the plain facts before you. Eighteen years ago your father forged my signature. The disputed cheque is in my possession, and the witnesses are yet alive whose testimony will condemn him to a felon's doom. Miss Desmond, I love your sister Eileen, and I wish to marry her, but the very passion of my love makes me inflexible in my conditions."

If she consents to be my wife, I will lavish every care, every luxury, upon her. Your father shall find me a generous son-in-law, and I will see, when you choose a husband, that you do not go to him empty-handed; but," he paused impressively, "if Eileen refuses me, I will take care she marries no other man. If I am rejected, within a month both you and she will be known as the children of a convict, and they will be rash men indeed who stoop to marry into a felon's family!"

If he expected her to faint or exclaim against his plans he was disappointed.

Maudie's smile was unchanged, her voice as sweet as ever.

"We will not discuss the alternative, Mr. Marsden. Of course Eileen will marry you?"

"She says not."

"Do you mean she has refused you?"

"She did at first. I pointed out to her the alternative, and expressed my willingness to wait until the end of the year for my answer."

"I am surprised. Eileen is perfectly infatuated over my father. I should have thought she would have done anything for his sake!"

"There was an obstacle," said Marsden, bitterly. "She fancies herself engaged to someone else."

"Impossible! I must have heard of it!"

"It happened while you were away—a young officer, a Mr. Courtenay. It seems your father refused his consent, but they look on themselves as bound to each other."

A dark cloud lowered over Maudie's face. Marsden was surprised at the change in her expression; it seemed like that of some strange, weird, evil thing.

"No sister of mine shall marry Basil Courtenay!"

"You seem to dislike him?"

"I hate him!" cried Maudie Desmond, passionately. "Mr. Marsden, I can't explain it to you, but I detest him! I felt it when I first saw him, before I ever heard his name. Between him and me there is a mortal antipathy! Easy if Basil Courtenay is your rival. I will see that Eileen does not marry him!"

But Marsden was gloomy.

"You seem to exaggerate your influence. You have just told me your sister is not fond of you, and yet you propose to win her from an attachment she has refused to give up to purchase her father's safety!"

Maudie smiled scornfully.

"I have powers you do not know of. Besides, I never said I would make Eileen give up Basil Courtenay. I only promised to part them."

"For good?"

"Or for evil!" said Maudie, dreamily. "At any rate, for ever!"

There was a pause.

These two had just ended a compact to blight the happiness of two other creatures who had never injured them, and yet no thrill of remorse was felt by either.

Henry Marsden was blinded by his fierce, jealous love. Any pang he might have felt was stifled by the recollection of his wrongs of long ago. It seemed to him what he had suffered through her parents gave him a positive claim on Eileen. As for Maudie, she was lost in reverie. Her thoughts had flown from Eileen to another girl about her age—sweet, grey-eyed Dorothy Courtenay.

She was marvelling what Cyril Westwood could see in this child to prefer her to herself.

For good or ill, for weal or woe, Maudie Desmond had given her heart to her cousin.

It is a mistake to think that women of her type cannot love. They can feel all the passion, all the rapture of the sentiment; but love which must make or mar a character most often mars theirs.

Maudie Desmond loved Cyril Westwood blindly, madly, intensely—but with a selfish, jealous passion. She would have given her life for his love, but she did not prefer his happiness to her own. She was willing to

sacrifice his dearest wishes if that could bring her own hopes any nearer realisation.

She could never recollect the time when she did not love her cousin. It was not that he was rich, and she was poor; nor that as his wife her utmost ambition would be gratified. She was a calculating, avaricious woman, but she would have married Cyril had he been penniless.

Her love for him was a secret only detected by his mother, whose wishes pointed to the same end.

For years Maudie hoped and waited. Lucy Courtenay's engagement seemed to her to remove her most dreaded rival, then she suddenly learned there was a younger sister.

The misguided, passionate creature hated Dorothy before she ever saw her. Had Maudie Desmond lived in an earlier age, pretty Dolly Courtenay's life would not have been worth many weeks' purchase; but the days of secret poisonings and stealthy assassinations are over, and the poor, jealous woman had to think of other means of ridding herself of her rival.

Under no circumstances could Maudie Desmond have become a good woman. The taint was in her blood; but, save for her disappointed love for Cyril Westwood, she would not have been quite the siren of evil she became.

She had but two objects in life—to win the man she loved, and to punish without mercy all those she hated.

She sat by Henry Marsden, and listened to him civilly enough, but even he could see her thoughts were far away. There was a rapt, visionary look upon her face, her eyes seemed of unnatural size, and the different colours in them shone out with unusual plausibility. She might have been some prophetic dreaming visions of things to come, so mystic was her face.

"You look tired," said Marsden, suddenly. "I daresay you are fatigued after your long journey. Pray, do not let me disturb you!"

She smiled, and came down from the clouds, but evidently by an effort.

"I think I will go upstairs; but first, Mr. Marsden, we must agree as to a course of action."

"You are on my side?"

"Decidedly; but sometimes I may appear to act against you; but remember you and I have the same object at heart, though we may seem at cross-purposes. I promise you, whatever happens, Eileen shall not marry Basil Courtenay!"

"An extraordinary woman," was Marsden's comment to himself as she left him. "Is it possible that she can be Desmond's daughter—a creature all nerve and soul—the child of that mass of worldly inanities! Well, if she has not over-rated her powers, I may consider the game won. I wonder who will marry my sister-in-law next? I rather pity the poor fellow. I can imagine her very fascinating, but it would be terrible to have a wife whose eyes seem always looking for things they can't see!"

Maudie went upstairs, and exchanged her black lace robe for a soft dressing gown, then she sat for a little while alone lost in thought, and finally took a small book from her desk and read two pages very attentively.

At last, when the house had grown still, when the last movement had died away, and it seemed certain everyone had retired, she opened her door, and went slowly down a long passage, carrying in one hand a small silver lamp, in the other a glittering ball, not unlike the brilliant globes once favourite ornaments for children's Christmas trees.

She was a very beautiful woman, but she had never looked lovelier than now, the crimson wrapper lighting up her face, and disengaging its deadly whiteness, her hair floating round like a dusky veil, and her eyes still with the strange, fixed look which Mr. Marsden had noticed.

An artist would have painted her as Joan of Arc listening for the "voices." She seemed

quite another being from worldly, frivolous Maudie Desmond.

It was long past her usual hour for rising when Eileen awoke the next day. The sun was shining into her room with unusual brightness for November, and Mrs. Ball stood waiting with her young lady's breakfast.

"Dear me, Miss Eileen," she said, with the familiarity of an old servant, "your headache ought to be gone. How you have slept! You were fast asleep when I went to bed last night, for I made bold to come in and look; and though I've been to see after you two or three times this morning, you were still sleeping. You ought to feel finely rested!"

"I don't," said Eileen, lazily. "I think Mrs. Ball, I must have had too much sleep, for I am just as tired as when I went to bed."

"If that's really so, Miss Eileen, you must be going to be ill," said Ball, anxiously. "But perhaps it'll wear off when you've had your breakfast.

"They've done theirs long ago downstairs. Miss Maudie sent her love, and she's gone to Whitby with Mr. Marsden. He came back yesterday in time for dinner, Miss Eileen, driving the prettiest little pony carriage you ever saw. I expect he hired it. Well, Tony won't grudge the trouble of looking after the ponies if you young ladies get some drives."

Eileen put up her hand, and brushed her long hair from her face.

"Where's papa, Ball?"

"Lord Desmond's gone to the village, Miss Eileen," returned the housekeeper, "and I've a great bit of news for you. Lady May's back at the Court."

"Oh, Ball!" and Eileen sat up with sparkling eye. "Do you really mean it? Who told you?"

"Sure, Miss Eileen, Tony met one of the Vivian servants yesterday. The Earl and Countess are still in London, but Lady May and her cousin came down two days ago. It seems Miss Courtenay is very delicate, and Lady Vivian thought the quiet would be good for her. Anyway, they're here, and now Lady May will be coming over to see you very soon."

But she had touched a painful chord. Eileen thought of the last time she had seen Lady May when, though not formally engaged to Basil, there yet stood no obstacle between them time and patience would not conquer. How could she meet her friend now, when, whatever she decided, she was parted from her lover for all time. How could she accept May's tender greeting, when she knew that happen what would, through her a cruel sorrow must surely light on May's cousin. To Basil's dismay, the poor child turned her face to the wall and burst into tears.

"Miss Eileen! Miss Eileen!" cried the old housekeeper anxiously, "what can I have said to vex you? Lady May is your own friend, and as sweet a young creature as I'd wish to see. I thought it would hearten you up a bit to know she was home again, for it's but sad and troubled you've looked lately, my dearie, and now to think I should have made you cry!"

Eileen tried to restrain her tears.

"I am very foolish, Ball, but I think I got upset yesterday; and then Maudie's coming home so unexpectedly excited me, I think."

"Miss Desmond's enough to excite any one!" agreed Ball, who had no love for her nominal mistress. "I'm sure, Miss Eileen, I wonder she doesn't wear herself out, and everyone else too."

"I don't think she does so much as that, said Eileen, with a keen remembrance that she usually performed her sister's work and her own too. "You know she often sits with her hands before her for hours together."

"Not sits, Miss Eileen," corrected the housekeeper. "Miss Desmond never settles to any work, I grant you, but she's always moving about. I'm sure it's a marvel to me she can do it. She's but a frail creature to look at; but she must have wonderful strength. Why it's

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my belief, Miss Eileen, she never went to bed at all last night. I know I met her at five this morning ready dressed!"

"And she has gone to Whitby?"

"Yes, but she'll be home to lunch. Do you think you'll get up, Miss Eileen? I think it's better for you to stay here and have your sleep out."

Eileen shook her head.

"No, Ball, that's laughing at me. By your showing I must have slept already right round the clock, so it's time I got up and stirred myself. I daresay Maude has not half finished her unpacking."

"That's no reason you should do it for her!" objected Mrs. Ball, "and you as tired as can be!"

"If Maude will entertain Mr. Marsden, I would much rather do her unpacking," said Eileen cheerfully. "I think the house will be much livelier for him now she is at home."

But a surprise awaited Eileen. Maude, usually the laziest of young women, had stirred herself, and finished her unpacking.

Her room looked as orderly and neat as though no sudden arrival had occurred. Even the boxes had been removed to the lumber closet.

Without a thought of intrusion, Eileen glanced round to see if her sister had added to her possessions. She did not venture to unlock the wardrobe, but divers nick-nacks scattered about told of presents, and among them Eileen noticed a huge locket of massive gold, with the initial "R" in red pearls, which she not unnaturally guessed to be a gift from Bob, and to contain his portrait.

Two other likenesses stood on the dressing-table. One, of a singularly pretty girl, had such a look of Basil Courtenay about the brow that his poor little *fiancee* felt pretty sure it must represent his younger sister. The other, a man of about thirty, with a grave, earnest face, touched Eileen's fancy, and unconsciously the thought flashed across her mind, "If Maude means to marry Bob Ernestoff, I hope she has not seen too much of this stranger. He looks so good, so manly, she might lose her heart before she knew it!"

The meeting with Henry Marsden was a trouble in anticipation to Eileen. She had parted from him after his passionate avowal of love, and not seen him since.

How would he greet her? Would he go back to his old rôle of friendly guest, or would he persist in reminding her of his wishes and all that rested on her compliance?

Lord Desmond was in the drawing-room when she reached it, and kissed her fondly. Eileen endured the caress rather than returned it. She could not quite forget all she had suffered from her father the day before.

"Is your headache gone, child? You look tired."

"I am tired," said Eileen, "but as on the authority of Ball, I have slept for more than twelve hours, I have no right to be fatigued. So Maude has come home. Were you surprised to see her?"

"I was very glad," replied Lord Desmond, meaningly. "She is a sensible girl; besides, as things are, it looks better for her to be here!"

"I never doubted Maude's sense," said Eileen, coldly, "and I think for Mr. Marsden's enjoyment it is a good thing she has returned. Entertaining guests is her *forte*, and never will be mine!"

"Maude is quite taken with him."

"I am so glad!"

"What an extraordinary girl you are. Don't you know she may spoil your chance of a rich husband?"

Eileen smiled sadly.

"If only Mr. Marsden would transfer his offer to her I should be delighted. I would welcome him warmly as a brother-in-law, and congratulate Maude with all my heart!"

"I don't think it is likely. Marsden is too old not to know his own mind; but Maude is charming!"

"I never felt so thankful to her charms as when I heard she had taken possession of Mr. Marsden for the morning!"

Lord Desmond looked annoyed.

"There is one matter I wish to mention to you," he said, stiffly. "I heard Lady May Delaval has returned to Vivian Court with her cousin, Miss Courtenay. She may ask you to visit her. I have no objection to your doing so if Maude is included in the invitation, but I will not have you go without her!"

Eileen, who had hardly known till that moment whether she most longed or dreaded to see Basil's kindred, learned by the prohibition how much she had built on the meeting with her friend.

"What reason am I to give, papa?" she asked, slowly. "Maude and I are not so devoted to each other as to be inseparable, you know!"

"I do not care what reason you give so long as I am obeyed. I know all that depends on your marrying Mr. Marsden, and I won't have any sentimental passages carried on between you and young Courtenay by means of these girls!"

"Then Maude is to accompany me to Vivian Court in the capacity of a spy? An honourable calling, truly! Does she approve of it?"

"It was her own suggestion!"

"I might have guessed so."

"I have had a long conversation with your sister this morning," went on Lord Desmond, pompously, "and she sees your duty very clearly."

"It is so easy to see other people's duty," objected Eileen, "and Maude is always hard on me!"

"She is not. She tells me you need think no more of Mr. Courtenay. His attentions to Miss Peyton have been most marked, and all Blenkinsop regards the match as a settled thing. I must remind you, Eileen, I distinctly refused your lover's suit. You may consider yourself engaged to him, but as a fact he is free as air. I gave him my answer in the plainest terms, and if he married Miss Peyton to-morrow, you would have no reason to complain, and no sane person would call his conduct dishonourable or blameworthy."

Eileen Desmond turned on him with flashing eyes.

"You need not defend his character to me!" she said, bitterly. "I know he is as incapable of dishonour as I am of forgetting him!"

It was rather an unlucky moment for Maude and her escort to appear, but perhaps Eileen's excitement carried her through the dreaded meeting better than she had hoped.

She did not refuse her suitor's hand, but let her little fingers meet his.

She answered his inquiries for her health courteously, if coldly; and, in fact, behaved far more graciously than her father had expected.

"One moment!" pleaded Marsden, when Maude was talking to her father at the other end of the large room which Eileen was on the point of leaving. "One moment! I offended you yesterday. I cannot take back a word I said, for I spoke nothing but the truth; but you need not fear my persecuting you (you called it persecution) again. Until the thirty-first of December I promise you never to refer to the subject. Cannot you therefore leave off trying to freeze me? Cannot you let things be as they were between us before yesterday? I give you my word I will not construe your kindness into signs of relenting. Only let us be friends, and put off thinking of the decision on which so much depends until it is called for."

Eileen looked at him doubtfully.

"I know what you are thinking," he said, quickly. "You fancy now, if you treat me with even ordinary cordiality, I shall presume upon it, and tell people you are going to make me happy. You are quite mistaken. To begin with, I am a reserved man, and possess few intimates. Then I have a dread of the ridicule which always falls on a man who marries a girl of half his age. Until you are

my wife not one of my acquaintances will ever hear of my wishes. I only ask you for the same measure of cordiality you accorded to me before yesterday, and which your sister already gives me. If you persist in showing everyone how you fear me, you will only be likely to enlighten them as to my desires."

Eileen bowed her head.

"I will do my best."

"I ask no more. Only remember that I would give my life for you, and that nothing in the world would induce me to boast of any favour you showed me! That is all I ask."

"What do you think of Maude?"

He smiled, as though he understood all she was thinking of.

"I consider Miss Desmond charming; but even if I had met her a month ago I should not have lost my heart to her. Your sister is a thorough woman of the world!"

Eileen sighed.

"I suppose you have told her?"

Henry Marsden smiled.

"Was it not the most natural thing to do under the circumstances?"

"What did she say?"

"I thought we were to avoid the subject of my wishes. Then why ask Miss Desmond's opinion?"

"I want to know."

"She said you were an obstinate child, and always did what you liked, and nothing else. In fact, Miss Eileen, charming as she is, she did not strike me as an affectionate sister."

Eileen was agreeably surprised that Maude made no reference to the matter.

Miss Desmond retired after lunch, and spent the afternoon no one quite knew where.

Eileen and Mr. Marsden played a game of chess at his desire, though it seemed to the poor girl a perfect mockery for them to sit down and affect to be occupied with little pieces of ivory, when both must be thinking of the strange link between them; but Mr. Marsden had admirable sang-froid. He seemed perfectly at ease, and fought as valiantly as though he had no interest in life stronger than giving his adversary checkmate.

Poor Eileen, weary and preoccupied, was no match for him, and in about half-an-hour was hopelessly vanquished.

"You have very pretty hands!" said Marsden, slowly, as he swept the men off the board to put them away. "Why do you never wear rings?"

"I don't possess such a thing."

"Then Mr. Courtenay did not give you one?"

Eileen shook her head.

"You do not understand. My father refused his consent to the engagement."

"You might have accepted the ring, nevertheless."

"I did not do so; and I would rather not speak of these things."

Maude came downstairs dressed for dinner, goodly vision in black lace and red roses; but she, too, looked tired, and Marsden, who seemed on friendly terms already, told her she had not recovered from her long journey.

"You must make up your mind not to go flying from one end of England to the other again. You ought to have broken your journey in London."

"I did! I stayed a night in Brompton."

"Alone?" and Eileen, who regarded her sister as a walking model of propriety, looked annoyed.

"Certainly!" laughingly answered Maude. "But don't look so horribly shocked. I went straight to my aunt's house, which was my home for years."

The next day passed uneventfully, except that May Delaval drove over to call on Eileen. Mrs. Ball gave her favourite the news when she returned from a blackberrying expedition, undertaken, strange to say, at the express request of Maude, who usually hated country walks.

"Oh, Ball, I am so sorry!" cried Eileen. "Didn't she leave a message?"

"She said she hoped to see you soon. I

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told her Miss Desmond had come home," went on Basil in a confidential tone, "and then she said she would write instead of calling here again. She seemed quite taken aback, which surprised me, as Miss Desmond was so much at the Court before she went to her aunt's!"

Eileen could guess the reason of her friend's change of manner. May, it might be, wanted to tell her something of Basil, and could not do so before her sister. Very likely she would write at once, and so the next morning Eileen once more betook herself to the lodge gates to watch for the postman.

She passed Mrs. Venn's door with a kind of awe. The old woman had proved herself so true a prophetess, but the widow was not in her accustomed seat by the window, indeed, there was a strange air of desolation about the house instead of its usual cheery aspect. Eileen wondered, half vaguely, whether Mrs. Venn had overslept herself, and then she ran on quickly, for in the distance she saw the well-known figure of the postman.

He put but one letter into her hands, at least she took it for a letter at first sight. A square envelope emblazoned with a crest, and directed in the hand she had often seen during her stay at Vivian Court and recognized at once. Basil had written to her. Could he have unexpectedly received promotion? Could he be claiming her promise? She tore open the envelope to find a withered rose shrouded in a simple sheet of paper, bearing this brief line,—

"I send back your flower. All is over between us." B.C."

(To be continued.)

## A DESPERATE DEED.

—CONT.—

## CHAPTER LIII.—(continued.)

LIONEL lost a little of his well-bred repose of manner.

"You should tell him of your admiration!" he declared.

"Oh, not for the world! Make him vain? Spoil his unconsciousness, his youthful artlessness—how can you suggest anything so dreadful?"

Was she serious?

The rose-red mouth was dimpling suspiciously at the corners.

"His simplicity, his sincerity, his childlike ways of looking at things are so refreshing!"

How aggravatingly in earnest she appeared! "Why, just a short time ago he was telling me how sadly he was situated. My heart quite ached for him."

He retreated in amazement.

"Did you say your heart?"

She nodded.

"Who would have dreamed it?" he queried, slowly.

"What?"

"That you had a heart."

She laughed; but she blushed, too.

"Not had—have."

There was something in his brown eyes now which forced her own shining orbs to drop—something very loyal and very passionate.

"How I wish," he whispered, "you would give it to me!"

A bold speech; but he who never was bold never was wise.

Valiantly, half-defiantly, she looked up at him, as, eager and silent, he stood before her. She was not pale or tired now. Never did June roses boast a more velvety pink than that sweet face of hers.

"Ah, I need it—for awhile!"

He stooped his dark head.

"Only for awhile? Then, Iva," his voice trembling ever so little—"then perhaps you will—"

Softly and gaily she laughed as she rose.  
"I will now!"  
"Now, Iva!"  
"Why not?" with a pretty, wondering smile. "I assure you I was very sorry for him!"

Lionel clinched his hands.

"For whom?"

"Mr. Christie."

"Oh, hang Mr. Christie!"

"Hang him—poor Mr. Christie? What a monstrous suggestion! No, indeed, though he confided to me life was hardly worth living, because the ladies made it such a torture to him."

She was smiling undisguisedly now.

"He said it seemed to be his misfortune, for it certainly was not his fault, to inspire affection which he could not return!"

Wrathful and disgusted though he was, Lionel relaxed into a smile.

"He told me," went on Iva, her beautiful eyes sparkling, her cheeks dimpling, her white teeth showing in irresistible enjoyment of the relation—"he told me such had ever been his lot. On beholding evidence of admiration in some susceptible maiden, he ever righteously endeavoured to crush, subdue it, at the risk of appearing unkind, but usually in vain. Just now a girl in Kerry and a widow in Dublin bewail his desertion. He laments his fascination; he was born to charm. He is cruel to be compassionate, he infers. And you wonder that I find him entertaining!"

Such a peal of laughter as the two broke into—such a ringing, merry, uncontrollable shout.

It brought a dozen clustering around them.

"Tell us the joke," insisted Randolph, endeavouring to make his refractory, because inexperienced, eyeglass stick. "What is so funny? I'm shuaah we would all appreciate it—shuaah!"

Again Lionel laughed explosively.

But Lady Iva turned to Mr. Christie with a smile which to him savoured of surrender.

"Don't ask me," sweetly. "It won't bear repeating. I don't think really you would care to hear it."

And then these happy, ridiculous young people laughed out heartily and spontaneously once more.

Ten minutes passed. Then Lionel had dragged himself away, and was out in the crisp, cold, moonlit night, and walking rapidly down the avenue.

He stopped to light a cigar. As he did so a horse sped by him.

Riderless? He could hear the stirrups clanking. Anything wrong?

He walked quickly on.

How brightly the moon shone! It made quite a glare on the snow. Every frost-diamond was glittering in the brilliance.

Hark! He stood still.

A shot! Another! Or was it an echo of the first?

Every nerve, every muscle, grew tense.

He flung away his cigar, gathered his strength, ran fleetly, just as fast as his strong young legs would carry him down the avenue.

There, in the middle of the drive, what—who was that? That small, trailing-robed, fur-cloaked figure?

He checked himself.

What had happened—what horrible tragedy?

He forced himself to go forward.

"Lady Silverdale!" he cried.

Slowly she turned.

Neither spoke.

Ghastly white she was, shaking. Her flashing fingers clutched a still smoking revolver. And over there, just beyond, something long and heavy and dark and motionless lay terribly distinct upon the snow.

## CHAPTER LIV.

"LADY SILVERDALE!"

It was with an effort he called out again. He could see her quite distinctly. Her

hood of crimson-lined fur had slipped from her head. The snow around her was not whiter than her face. There was something vaguely terrible in the glittering brilliance of her eyes.

Her answer was a laugh—a shuddering, heart-sick, bitter laugh.

"I failed—I missed, did I not?" she cried.

And suddenly, before he could interpose, move a step, she threw up her right arm, the hand which held the revolver, and flung the weapon fiercely from her. It sped through the bare-branched trees, fell in the snow.

Instantly Lionel Curzon recognised the madness of the act.

Search for it now would be vain; but it assuredly would be found, and if it bore any distinguishing mark—any peculiarity by which its ownership could be traced—a vague, startling horror of the suspicions which might arise swept through his brain—staggered him. And her rash, mad speech—if any but he had chanced to hear it!

He sprang forward, caught her hand in—her pretty, bare, cold, diamond-set hand.

"Hush!" he cried, authoritatively. "Don't let anyone hear you speak so—ever. You did not miss your aim; look there!"

He dropped her hand, rushed toward the dark form prostrate on the snow.

For an instant she stood statue-like, fairly petrified. Then she followed him.

A queer scene, in truth. The magnificent curving avenue; on either side centuried oaks; the dazzling moonlight on dazzling snow; the three figures, one lying prone. Over him Lionel Curzon bent.

"Good Heaven!" he cried.

There was no doubt, no mistake whatever. The slender, fur-coated figure, the chiseled, blonde-moustached, aristocratic face.

He swung around to the Countess.

"It is Damyn—Sir Geoffrey Damyn! And he is dead!"

She did not stir nor speak.

Lionel was dumbfounded. Then he remembered.

Why should she pretend amazement, dismay, when her only fear had been she had missed her aim.

He turned from her, dropped on his knees. He pulled open the great-coat, laid his ear upon the heart of the corpse.

No sign of life, no faintest throb or beat rewarded him.

He rose slowly.

His hands felt strangely warm and damp. He glanced at them. They were crimson, dripping. Hastily he rubbed them in his handkerchief.

"Come, your ladyship!"

He offered her his arm. Mechanically she laid her fingers upon it.

They turned—leaving that black and quiet thing upon the snow—walked together up the avenue.

She seemed in a sort of trance. She was neither disturbed nor excited.

An indifference stupid and profound, an actual torpor, had succeeded her passionate perturbation.

But her companion was thrilling fiercely with repulsion—condemnation. The discovery had shocked him unutterably.

Damyn dead! Damyn, who had been his rival, with whom he had quarrelled yesterday, to whom he had promised a reply to-day. And now he was dead—murdered!

By whom? Of that he would not—must not—think. What had driven her to such a desperate deed? he wondered.

He recalled the scene in the library at Mrs. Trendworth's a few nights ago. The Countess lying unconscious on the lounge, Sir Geoffrey bending over her, his eyes, with a great horror in them, fixed full upon her scarred palm! What recollection, what recognition, had he read there?

Before them rose the lighted windows of the castle. As with one accord, they paused. She slipped her hand from his sleeve.

Without a word or look she sped from him

along the terrace, and up a little spider iron staircase which led to the southern wing. With a bewildered face, Curzon looked after her.

What was he to do? Had he, on his way home, come upon the body—merely that—he would immediately have raised an alarm. But to discover the murdered man, and with him—or at least near him—the Countess of Silverdale, smoking revolver in hand—ah, that was a different thing altogether!

To criminate, in the slightest way implicate her, was out of the question. There could be no doubt of her guilt—none whatever. That was no reason, though, he should put blood-hounds on her track.

What was the secret existing between her and Damyn? With what threat had he been terrifying her, this afternoon, when she had cried out so passionately:

"If you do, I will kill you!"

Oh, he could not solve the mystery, if mystery there was at the back of it. And he must not leave the poor fellow, who, so strong and bright and healthy, had left them a few hours ago, stiffening therein the snow.

How it did drift and swirl—the snow.

In little gusts and eddies the wind swept it up around him.

A man came tearing around the house. He slackened his rapid pace as he beheld the young fellow standing stock-still in the moonlight.

"Bless my soul, sir!" breathlessly, and touching his hat as he spoke. "We got a scare just now, me and Tom, when Sunset came a gallopin' in. Did he act vicious, Sir Geoffrey?"

Lionel turned—confronted him.

The groom fell back.

"Mr. Curzon!"

"Yes. Sir Geoffrey lies half-way down the avenue—dead!"

"Dead, sir?"

The man leaped forward.

"Then he was thrown after all?"

"Go and get some of the servants together, and some sort of a stretcher!" he commanded without answering the question.

He hurried forward, and up the ermaceous steps.

He lifted the heavy knocker, sent his summons resounding through the Castle. A footman opened the door.

"I must see the Earl here—at once!" Lionel cried, pushing by him. "I—"

He stopped short.

For here was Lord Silverdale himself—all the others, too for the matter of that. Not all. He could not see the Countess. But the vast hall was half filled with gay, laughing courtly people, in the magpie solemnity of masculine full dress, and the luirous sheen of feminine attire.

"Just back in time, dear boy! Glad you changed your mind. We are all going down to the servants' hall. They have their dance to-night, you know. Come along!"

How unconscious he was—they were! Where was she? Where was the Countess?

Of the many present, only one read disaster in his face. Lady Iva alone noticed how its splendid dark beauty had blanched; how full of hesitation—horror, were his bold, brown eyes.

Swiftly, straightly, she passed through them all. So direct her movement, speech ceased.

Half curiously, the others looked after her. She went straight up to where her lover stood, lifted her clear, brave eyes to his.

"What is wrong? Something has happened—what?"

Upon the thoughtless throng a prescient silence fell.

"Eh? What's that?" cried the Earl, joining them. Anything out of the way, Curzon?"

Every eye was fixed on him.

"Yes. Sir Geoffrey Damyn is dead!"

"Dead!"

A murmur like the rustling of dry leaves went

through the hall as they incredulously repeated the word.

Dead! Why, he had been with them such a short time ago, strong and well. He had laughed back at them standing in the doorway there, where Lionel stood now. Dead! Oh, it was impossible!

"Oh, look here, Curzon, don't you know?" protested his lordship. "That's a beastly poor joke. You can't—"

And all the time the midnight was gleaming on a staring face; all the night the flurries of snow drifting over, stinging it.

The young fellow strode forward. He lifted his hand with an imperious gesture. There was that in his wild glance which carried conviction. He spoke clearly, ringing:

"I tell you Sir Geoffrey Damyn is dead. He lies out there on the avenue with a bullet in his brain!"

## CHAPTER LV.

For one moment silence, intense, thunderstruck. Then they all broke out talking at once.

Coming suddenly this way, in the midst of their merriment, their Christmas revelry, the news thrilled to the heart the most *blaze*, most callous of them.

Commotion reigned; a hundred exclamations of dismay, regret, conjecture, sprang to their lips. They pressed around Lionel for particulars, explanations.

The Earl laid his hand on his shoulder.

"Lionel, my boy, listen to me. Is it suicide?"

He turned impudently to reply. His lips paled. What was he about to say? *murder*?

No, he must not be the first to put on foot inquiry which might lead to her.

Lord Silverdale observed his confused silence, his sudden hesitant self-repression. They all did.

"That I did not wait to determine. There are the servants with a stretcher. Who will come?"

Half a dozen started forward, hastily donned wrappings.

They went out; the great doors clang'd behind them. Those remaining did not think of retiring—or even leaving the hall. They clustered together around the blazing hearth, and talked of the tragedy, of the victim, of the possible cause of the affair, of their own astonishment and dismay.

It was awful to consider that in the midst of life they were in death. Aunt Clara assured them, with an originality which was quite refreshing. Such a perfect gentleman! Had he any near relatives living? It was not long since he had come into his baronetcy, was it? How oddly he had insisted on going into town this evening, though the Earl had tried to dissuade him. Was it suicide, they wondered, or could it really be anything worse?

And so they chattered on in subdued, well-bred fashion—said how sorry they were, how shocked! And that handsome Mr. Curzon—how pale, how perplexed, really terror-stricken he had looked!

All the time the firelight flickered on their satins and silks, glowed in their velvets, played hide-and-seek in their rare old laces, dashed in their jewels, glittered over their ringed, patrician hands, fluttered their fair faces.

And all the time, too, while they spoke of their pity, their amazement, their nervousness and bewilderment, all the time there was a certain warmth at their hearts, a certain pleasurable palpitation.

They would not have killed him—have had him killed, rather—for the whole world. Neither, for the matter of that, would they have wilfully assassinated a kitten or a mouse.

But the excitement of such a sudden death, whether murder or suicide, was something new, something thrilling.

Did not the Roman women crave some such ferocious stimulus when they turned their thumb downward on the questioning glance of the gladiator?

Twelve! Out pealed the measured strokes.

"Where is Lady Iva?"

It was Mrs. Shirley, a bewitching bride, who had propounded the question.

Ah, here she was now, coming down the stairs!

"I went up to tell mamma," she said. "She was lying down, still dressed, but asleep, so I did not like to awaken her." She did not join the others.

On the lowest step of the staircase she sank wearily. What awful things were always happening! She had just made up her mind it was such a good world, such a bright, cheery, pleasant world! And here, within the last four-and-twenty hours, were two she had known and daily met—dead!

How could they sit there discussing it so zestfully. She felt fairly stunned, chilled.

"Pocah Geoff!" ejaculated a voice beside her. "Doosid unpleasant thing to happen a man—especially on such an extremely nasty night."

She glanced up at Mr. Randolph Christie. Reddish as to skin, as to hair, as to moustache was that young gentleman, very gorgeous as to attire.

"Death can be hardly considered delightful any night," she answered, coldly.

She wished he would go away. He did not mean to be flippant, of course, but it was not in his nature to be anything else.

Mr. Christie stared at her.

Suddenly he recollects he could not see without his eye-glass, and hastily adjusted that convenient article. It seemed to prove an aid to his obtuse perception if not to his sight, for quite startlingly and comprehensively he laughed out.

"Yes—aw, yes, of coabs! Quite so. Now I wondah if it was heaht disease? I do, don't you know?"

She did not answer.

Randolph struck an attitude, and stroked his moustache with a tenderness most commendable, considering its delicacy and extreme youth.

"I knew a case of heaht disease—yeaht yeah—so said I. A young lady—a charming young lady—was so awfully ill, with it—wont eve'hewah for relief—caused by disappointment of some sawt—some secret sorrow, you know. We had been good friends—no moah—at least my interest was—aw—meahly consinly. I had neah said a syllable, I assah you, which could have led her to think that my affections were—aw—beatowah upon her. Soh I went away—the only thing left a fellah of honah to do, don't you know?"

"She died, of course?" quietly put in Lady Iva.

"Aw—no."

"No?" amazedly.

"No. You see, she felt so—so pigned, you know, she married the fi'st man who—"

"The first man, after all. And Love was her physician! They were happy ever after, I suppose. How charmingly your little idyl ends!"

In her shimmering azure draperies she rose up, stately and beautiful, flashed him a sweet, provoking smile, and moved away.

"Hark?" someone cried.

Without was the heavy, snow-muffled tread of men's feet.

Jimmie Talbot went quickly forward, threw the huge doors wide.

In swept a blast of wind which set the lights dancing—an icy air and a skurry of snow.

Under the lofty portals, slowly and reverently entered a dozen men, bearing in their midst a stretcher, on which lay an appallingly quiet figure.

Across the threshold—over the very spot where he had so lately stood and jested—they

carried him in. In the centre of the great hall they laid him down.

A painful silence fell upon all. They burned with curiosity, yet shrank from speech, as though it were sacrilege in the presence of that which, through the shawl cast over it, was so grimly, so starkly outlined.

"Is it suicide?" questioned Mr. O'Donnell.

The rest listened with tense eagerness.

The men were dashing off the powdery snow which clung to them, removing their coats.

The Earl answered. His fair, Saxon, brown-bearded face looked pale and fierce.

"No!" he cried—"It is murder!"

And my lady heard.

## CHAPTER LVI.

"MURDER!"

The gruesome word went shuddering through the hall. Oh, surely not! it could not be that! Who would murder him? What fee had he?

Scared, trembling, intensely excited, they looked at each other and spoke in shivering whispers.

"It was not the deed of a tramp or highwayman," his lordship went on with angry sternness. "His watch and money are safe. It was the work of some cowardly enemy—a most dastardly deed!"

Up rose a clamour of queries, suggestions. Had any step been taken? Had the news been sent to the police—to Rothlyn?

"Yes," Lionel replied, "we've done all we could do. One messenger has gone to arouse the police, and then to telegraph the news to Scotland Yard."

A hundred suppositions were proffered—rejected. It was a horrible, incomprehensible, a brutal tragedy.

"Hush!" cried Lady Iva. "Here is mamma!"

And she had been so ill recently—she must not be alarmed. Immediately her guests remembered that—lowered their tones.

Slowly, very slowly, step by step down the grand stairway she came in her trailing black velvet dress, against which her arms gleamed white as marble, the crimson roses still drooping at her breast.

"Lilian!"

The Earl strode toward her. She seemed neither to see nor hear him as, with that slow, deliberate motion, she came on down.

"Lilian, love!" he extreated, "you are not strong enough; go back to your room. You will be ill again—you—"

Wholly unheeded, she brushed by him—passed gently on.

Along the hall she went, till she reached the stretcher laid across the ranged chairs. There she paused.

Silently, with the utmost calmness, she put out her hand; lifted the covering.

Through the great, raftered hall outrang Iva's protesting cry:

"Oh, little mamma, don't!"

Too late. The shawl shroud was laid softly back, and my lady stood looking down on Geoffrey Damyn's dead face.

She forgot the frightened people around her, the inquisitive glances. She forgot the presence of the Earl—or her step-daughter. She forgot all things in Heaven and on earth except that he who lay before her, rigid and ghastly, had been the lover of her youth—the father of her child.

How handsome he looked, how calm, how noble. Save for one small red spot upon the forehead, over which the blood had congealed, the face was undisfigured. The smooth brow, the aquiline curve of the nose and chin, the somewhat heavy lids, the thin lips under the drooping blonde moustache, were familiar as in life. But death had given back to the dead man's countenance a certain boyishness, an expression, air, the one he had loved, of late had missed.

This was the man she had threatened this very afternoon to kill should he expose her. He had left the house to commence that exposure. He was killed.

Had she not to-night decided that he must be effectually silenced, and that there was only one way to do it? Well, was he not? And yet—and yet how she used to listen for his coming once! and how loving, how fervent he had been! Oh, that blissful far-off summer by the sea! He had never been false. He had adored her then and after. It was all a mistake—a terrible and bitter blunder—and he was dead!

"Harold! Oh, the woman loved him—yes, as she child did not, could not, have loved Damyn. But she was not thinking of Harold now. Only of him to whom had been surrendered her sweet, fresh girlhood. And—how queer it sounded—he was dead!

"Lilian!"

The Earl's voice. She started. Oh, she had been miles—years away!

"Come, dear, you need rest. Come!" A resentful restlessness had come upon him. How statue-like she stood there! And how white she was—how deathly white. That strange expression, too, in her large, grey eyes—sad, dreamful, half tender, brilliant, and brooding!

Would they not remark her, consider, vivisect her—these keen, critical London guests of hers? What might they not think—say?

Indeed they were beginning to murmur to each other that the dear Countess was very—well, peculiar!

Here she had rushed off to see some sick child in the middle of her own magnificent ball. Last evening—for it was morning now—she had absented herself from the drawing-room. She had made no apologies, had simply slipped away, not to appear again till she came gliding down the stairs, silent, wild-eyed, and wan as a ghost. And there she stood, apparently deaf and blind to all around her, staring down on the dead face of her guest. More than peculiar such conducted seemed almost eccentric.

Had there been insanity in the Woodville family? marvelled more than one of these great ladies, clustered together like a flock of bright-plumaged birds.

An imperative knock.

Immediately the door was opened. Four men filed in—the doctor, the police-inspector, and a couple of officers.

My lady turned on them her small, white face, from which her eyes shone brilliant as black diamonds.

A look of fear—of downright dread—crept across her countenance.

No need to urge her now to leave the spot. She shrank from it. She pressed closely to the Earl's side, clutched his hand.

"Take me away!" she implored, below her breath.

Very gently he drew her with him to the stairs. They passed on, up out of sight.

Their departure was the signal for a general breaking-up. The ladies vanished to their rooms. Most of the men also disappeared. Mrs. Brown hustled up and took charge.

By the hearth, in the dying fire-glow, a little knot of guests and officials stood conversing in low tones.

Upstairs, in the warmth and seclusion of her velvet-hung boudoir sat my lady. The Earl walked excitedly up and down the room.

"I can't understand the thing," he declared, gloomily. "It's not suicide. That much is plain from the nature of the wound. Though the ball came out at the forehead, it was fired from behind. Poor Damyn! I wonder if he had spoken to Iva? An aggravating mystery, this killing. And he was so persistent about going into town to-night. If we can only discover his motive, his errand, we may gain a clue to the tragedy. That an unfeeling young fellow should be shot down like a dog, it's a disgrace to Silverdale—to me!"

His wife made no reply. She sat motion-

less, strangely apathetic. Her gemmed hands lay stirless on the thick, dark velvet of her gown. She looked straight before her.

The Earl came up to her, leaned his folded arms across the back of her chair.

"A disgrace to Silverdale," he repeated, "and to me! But I'll find the cowardly murderer. That shall be my task. I'll find him—I swear to Heaven I will—if I have to populate Sussex with detectives, and let them swarm like rabbits through Silverdale!"

His wife moved, sat erect. She turned her stone-cold face around, up to his.

"Why should you feel it so incumbent on you to—avenge him? He was nothing to you."

"He was my guest," the Earl replied, quickly, a pained surprise in his voice. "And that title—as you know, Lilian—has always been a sacred claim to men of our race."

She sighed wearily, and sank into her former listless attitude.

She was weak still, worn out by all this excitement, Lord Silverdale thought, with a pang of pity. Poor little thing, he must get her to bed and to sleep as quickly as possible.

He came around, dropped on his knees, bent over the little feet encased in the high-heeled Spanish slippers.

"Hurry, dear; you require some rest. I shall be your maid for once," with a bright and loving smile.

He stooped over the pretty, buckled slippers, his fingers awkward with haste, with clumsy kindness."

"Why, Lilian!" He sank back, looked blankly up at her. "Your feet are wet—quite wet. Even your gown—the edge is soaking! You were not—surely you were not outdoors to-night?"

She did not speak. He rose, stood frowning down upon her.

"Lilian," very low and stern his voice, full of the vaguest, wildest dread, "answer me! Were you out in the snow to-night?"

My lady sprang up. Back to her pale cheeks came a scarlet glow, to her big, dark eyes a mocking flash.

The smallest, slightest evidence of suspicion on his part invariably aroused all that was worst, most reckless in her.

"I went out on the balcony there for a breath of fresh air; the house was stifling. And perhaps I did get my feet and my dress wet. Is your lordship's examination over? or am I still adjudged guilty of romantic and rheumatic wanderings under the Christmas moon?"

She rang her bell, and struggled with a yawn.

A painful silence.

Jane made her sleepy appearance; and the Earl of Silverdale turned and went, heavily, stupidly, broodingly, out of the room and down the stairs.

## CHAPTER LVII.

THREE! four! five!

And in Silverdale Castle all was still. A few lights burned here and there in the vast pile. The fire in the hall had burned down, almost out.

With a desire to give the place the funeral air she considered proper, Mrs. Brown had extinguished several of the lamps.

Sepulchral was the gloom—sepulchral the silence. The corners were full of wavering, mysterious shadows.

A few muffled figures clustered near the hearth. Now and then they half turned to cast a nervous glance toward the stark and rigid thing which lay in the centre of the hall.

In the pleasant breakfast-room a good-humoured fire crackled with jollity, and the amber-shaded lamps burned mellow and bright.

Here congregated half-a-dozen gentlemen—Captain Richardson, Mr. O'Donnell, Inspector Ward (from Rothlyn), Lionel Curzon, and a little roly-poly man who possessed more filthy

more than brains, and stammered most lamentably.

There was liquor on the polished mahogany table, but they drank little, though they smoked and talked a good deal.

The Earl opened the door—looked in upon them.

"Come in!" they cried.

He advanced, a trifle dazed on coming out of the dim hall into the sudden glare. He was still in evening dress. Indeed, except Inspector Ward, who wore his braided fatigue uniform, they all were formally and fashionably clad.

"I invited myself to remain, Lord Silverdale," Lionel said. "I knew the inquest would probably be held early and I would be needed. It was hardly worth my while to go home and return."

"That is right. You know you are always welcome. No, thanks, Richardson; I don't care to smoke."

And away he wandered again, like an athletic and unquiet spirit.

He was back within the hour, and this time he sat down and listened to the fluent talk of the others. The golden vintage in the cut-glass decanters had ebbed somewhat. The air was thick with cigar smoke.

But with the coming dawn a messenger was speeding. His knockebood through the house. They looked at each other, sat silent, listening. A few moments elapsed, then a servant appeared in the doorway.

The man addressed the master of the Castle.

"The night clerk at Rothlyn to see your lordship or Mr. Ward."

"About the murder?"

"Yes, your lordship."

"Tell him to come in."

The servant disappeared.

Young Curzon flung his cheroot into the grate and swung around with his back to the mantel.

The newcomer tiptoed down the passage, presented an alert face to the gentlemen in the breakfast-room. He had never gained entrance to the Castle before. The importance of the present occasion quite thrilled him.

The Earl pushed his chair around, threw one leg over the other.

"Come in," he commanded, "and shut the door!"

Timidly the stranger crossed the sacred threshold, softly he closed the heavy door, respectfully stood before the Earl and his friends.

"Now, my man, what do you know? Speak up!"

He made an effort to do so, but between excitement, importance, and awe of the exalted company in which he found himself, his teeth chattered and his words were inaudible.

"Are you drunk?" demanded his lordship, sternly.

Lionel burst out laughing. To save his soul he could not help it.

"Hold on, Silverdale! Can't you see the poor devil is beastly sober? That is what's the matter with him. Half frozen, too, I'll bet, from his cold ride. Here, Mr. Telegrapher—that name will do as well as any, won't it?—put this under your waistcoat, and you can talk without knocking your teeth out."

He poured out half a goblet of liquor, handed it the man.

The latter sent a quavering, grateful smile up to the friendly, handsome young face above, grasped the proffered glass and briskly disposed of the contents.

"Well?" queried Richardson.

They were all looking intently, earnestly at him.

The man choked over the final swallow in his eagerness to reply.

"Just this, gentlemen: I was sitting in the station, this evening, when a gentleman came in. He shook the snow off and came up to the window. Then I saw it was one of your lordship's visitors—Sir Geoffrey Damyn."

"Yes—go on!"

"He took up a blank form, wrote a message—"

"A telegraphic despatch?" asked Mr. O'Donnell.

"Yes, sir. About as quickly as he had written it he tore it up. He thought a minute, then took another sheet and wrote again. This he held out to me. I was just taking it when he drew it back. Seemed as if he couldn't make up his mind to let it go. 'Second thoughts are best. I won't send it,' he said. He gave me a couple of cigars, buttoned up his coat and went out. A few hours ago, when a servant from the Castle came in to send a telegram to London, he told me about the murder. 'Why,' I cried, 'that very gentleman was here to-night!' We roused the station-master. He said: 'Go up to the Castle and tell the Earl just when Sir Geoffrey was here. The testimony may be some clue.' So I came."

There was a disappointed silence.

"Is that all you know?" questioned the Earl.

"Yes, sir—unless that the second draft he wrote I think you can find."

"What do you mean?"

"Careless like, not seeming to think of what he was doing, he stuffed the slip into his pocket."

"Ah! Well, you had better remain at the Castle till after the inquest. Just touch that bell, Bariston. Thanks!"

(To be continued.)

## RUBY'S DESTINY.

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### CHAPTER III.—(continued.)

IRA AND RUBY continued their walk, but about a mile from the church Ira Norton perceived the small feet were no longer following in his track. He turned back, and saw Ruby sitting on a stone, the tears falling down her cheeks.

"What is the matter?" he asked, in a very different tone from that he had used before. After all, she was little more than a child, and her pursuit of him was more her mother's doing than her own. "You will catch cold sitting here!"

"I don't care," said Ruby, defiantly. "I am so tired. I can't walk a step further. mean to stay here."

"But it is getting dark. You will be frozen!"

"I don't care!"

She was a very spoilt child, evidently. Ira, who as a rule shunned and disliked all women, yet felt a kind of pity for her distress, in spite of her wilfulness.

"Will you tell me what I can do for you?"

"Nothing."

"Don't you think you are a little unreasonable?" he suggested, gently. "I daresay you feel tired; but that is not my fault. I want to help you if you will only tell me how. Shall I stay here till you are rested? It's quite impossible you can stay alone. Or could you manage to get as far as the parsonage? It's close by. The Wards are very nice people; and, though your mother is not very friendly with them, she wouldn't mind your resting there and having a cup of tea. All girls like tea."

The burst of silvery laughter which rewarded this speech made him think once more he had to do with a runaway lunatic; but Ruby, the last vestige of her ill-humour gone, sat up and explained,

"Oh, I couldn't help it! I haven't an idea who you are, but I'm quite sure you're taking me for somebody else. Why, I haven't got a mother; and the Wards are my only friends in Combe Norton. I have been spending the day there, and they told me a short cut home."

"Which you missed," returned Ira. "But

perhaps you will tell me your wishes? Shall I stay here, or shall I send Mr. Norton's carriage—if you really want to go to the Court—here?"

"You can go on," said Ruby, ungraciously, "and I can come when I am rested. I can see the church steeple, and I know my way now. I won't be a trouble to a stranger who doubts my word."

"I am not aware that I did doubt it; but if you knew the Squire's habits as well as I do—"

"I know them better—far better!" declared Ruby. "Haven't I lived in his house for a fortnight, and eaten fourteen mutton chops?"

"Indeed!" very drily. "You must be fond of mutton."

"I hate it!"

"The Squire is a vegetarian, and he can hardly be accountable for the chops."

"They are cheap," said Ruby, in a burst of confidence. "You see, there's no waste, and one can't have any more. Priscilla says the butcher brings four mutton chops every day."

The young man bit his lip impatiently.

"I hope it is not so bad as your words imply. But, since you have told me so much about your temporary home, perhaps you will add one more piece of information. What is your name?"

She answered his question by another.

"Who did you think I was?"

"Mrs. Gordon's daughter. She has one, I know, and there has been a talk for a long time of her coming to the Court."

"Has there! Oh, I wish she would come! It would be so nice to have a girl to talk to you! Do you think Mrs. Gordon will really have her?"

"I know she wants to; but," with a smile, "you have not answered my question."

"My name?" said Ruby, indifferently. "Well, since I came to Westshire I have almost ceased to have one. Everyone speaks of me as the Squire's niece."

"The Squire's niece! I never heard he had one."

"He wishes he hadn't," said Ruby, frankly. "The only time I ever saw him he said it was hard I should be added to his burdens."

"You must be Captain Norton's daughter! I heard he had died abroad."

"Not quite a month ago. Did you know him?"

"No one in England had a chance of doing that lately. Then he left you to my—to the Squire!"

"Till I am twenty-one. When I heard how poor Uncle John was I wanted to earn my own living, but Mr. Dyason said it was all settled for me to stay at the Court till I was of age. It's nearly eighteen months. Only think what a number of chops I shall eat!"

"You will have to change your bill of fare," he said, gravely. "And now, if you are rested, I think we might go on."

"But are you going to the Court? I am sure the Squire won't like it. He hates strangers!"

"But I am not a stranger. I meant to have told you before, only you did not give me time. I am your cousin, Ira Norton!"

The announcement did not seem to make much impression on her.

She said carelessly,

"And are you going to stay at the Court? Priscilla says a week is the longest visit you ever pay. I suppose you get tired?"

"Yes."

"Perhaps you don't like Mrs. Gordon?"

"I hate her."

"And yet you took me for her daughter?"

He laughed.

"It wasn't the resemblance, I assure you; neither was the wish father to the thought. The truth is, for the last three years I have heard so much of Cynthia Gordon's perfection that I am sick at the sound of her name."

They walked on—abreast this time, and not in Indian file. They had passed the lodges before Ruby thought to ask,

"Do they expect you?"

"I think so. I slept at Gloucester last night, and sent my man over early this morning with the luggage. He ought to have been at the Court by eleven. I took a later train and walked from Combe Magnus. My father hates to see me arrive in a hired trap, and I dislike to trust my trunks to the mercy of David and his ancient steeds."

"They brought me to the Court. They took just four hours!"

"I daresay."

"And you have a valet? Doesn't your father think it extravagant? I do."

"Andrew is not exactly a valet. He is cook, housekeeper, courier, and friend by turns on my travels. He was our groom in my mother's time, and he has been devoted to me ever since. My father has given me up in despair. He knows he shall never succeed in making me economical. As I have only a life interest in my property I can't run into debt or anticipation."

"And it isn't yours while he lives?"

"Oh! you mean the Court?" said Ira, lightly. "My father has told me such harrowing tales of poverty that I never take that into consideration. I have a few hundreds a-year from my mother, quite enough to keep me in comfort. The Squire often wonders I am not ruined; but I don't think, really, I am extravagant. I never yet had a bill I couldn't pay, so that doesn't look like it!"

"How lucky!" said Ruby, with a little sigh. "Why, in Paris, Deborah and I used to be always coaxing people to wait till papa was richer, and I used to dread the sight of a common envelope, for it always meant a bill."

"Poor child!" said Ira, kindly. "I fear your life can't have been a very bright one, and I see no chance of its becoming brighter at the Court."

"I shouldn't mind if it would be fine," said Ruby, sadly, "but it has rained every day except this since I came. Is it always wet here?"

"Generally," said Ira, cheerfully. "They used to tell me when I was at school the Welsh hills attracted the moisture from the skies. I remember detesting the Welsh hills in consequence."

"Here we are!" said Ruby, as Ira knocked at the door. "Priscilla, did you think I was lost? And please, who ate my chop?"

But it was not Priscilla, but a very respectable man, clad in the Norton livery, who held the door open.

"Dinner is at eight, madam," he said to Ruby, respectfully; "and the Squire is waiting for you in the library."

Down to the kitchen ran Miss Ruby as soon as her cousin and her henchman had disappeared. There she found Priscilla very hot, very important, and extremely anxious.

"Never such a thing happened before, miss, as Mr. Ira to come home and Mrs. Gordon out! That Andrew is as handy a man as you'd find, and he's brought a horse, so I sent him off to the town at once for things; but I'm not used to cooking, and though Andrew says he'll 'wait,' and Sarah promises to do her best, how we shall get through dinner I can't think."

"Won't Mrs. Gordon be back?"

"She can't be here now till ten. She must have missed the train."

"And does Ira dine all alone?"

"Bless me, no, Miss Ruby! The master comes in, though he eats nothing but his horrid soup, and he sent word you were to sit at the head of the table opposite him."

"Me!" said Ruby, with a delightful disregard of grammar. "Me! Oh! Priscilla, what is it? I hope not chops."

"There's soup and fish, Miss Ruby, and roast fowl and boiled tongue, sweets and cheese. I don't manage any entrées, and Andrew says Mr. Ira never eats them, so it won't matter. You can go and take a peep at the dining-room now if you like. I've laid the cloth all ready."

Ruby held her breath. Opening from the huge banqueting hall was a smaller room,

and this, now bright with fire and lamps, held a table covered with fine damask, heavy, crested silver, and delicate transparent glass; hothouse flowers filled an *épergne* in the centre. It looked, in fact, like the dinner-table of a refined and wealthy man.

"Oh, dear!" said Ruby to herself. "How will he ever make up for this? Even if Ira only stays three days it will cost pounds and pounds! He'll have to put us on half a chop a-day, or else cut off meat entirely till he has got over this!"

Miss Norton felt so hungry she would not have minded had the feast begun sooner; but she had hardly reached her own sitting room when Andrew knocked at the door, and entered with a small tray.

"The Squire thought you would be too tired to come down to tea, madam," and he placed on the table a cup of fragrant Bohemian tea with a saucer of cream, and a plate of poundoak, while Andrew gravely lighted two wax candles, also on the tray, as composedly as though he did not see the two inches of composite which was hoisted economically on a *saucette*.

Miss Norton ate the cake and drank the tea with great goodwill. Then she went into the bedroom and began to think of dressing.

Such a ceremony had not been needed since she came to the Court, but Deborah had not grasped the fact of the Squire's perfect isolation, and so the hardly-purchased mourning outfit contained one or two toilets quite suited for mild festivities.

When a girl is young and pretty—or even when she is young alone—it takes so little to dress her charmingly. Good taste and a few shillings will accomplish so much.

The soft grenadine had been bought at a sale. Its narrow black lace and bugle trimming had done duty more than once before; but Ruby's white throat and pretty, rounded arms gleamed through it like alabaster, and costly velvet could not better have defined the graceful outlines of her figure.

She recoiled her silky hair, placed a gold chain and pearl locket—her whole trinket—round her neck, and felt she was a success.

"I am only a poor relation," she reflected to herself, "but I don't think I look dowdy! And, oh! I am glad Miss Gordon chose to-day to go and see her daughter!"

Enter Priscilla.

"Dinner's just ready, Miss Ruby, and the gentlemen are in the library. There wasn't time to get the drawing-room ready. You'd best be going down. My, you look like a picture!"

Ruby let her long, trailing skirts fall around her, and swept downstairs as composedly as though she were on the most intimate terms with her uncle, instead of never having set eyes on him since the night he asked if she was in love.

Her self-possession stood her in good stead. Some girls would have been trembling with nervousness. Ruby was equally free from fear and self-assurance.

She turned the handle of the library door without a flutter of her heart, and advanced to meet her relations just as though a family dinner was quite the regular feature at Norton Court.

The Squire looked his best in evening dress—sad and prematurely old perhaps, but every inch an English gentleman.

The room was ablaze with candles, and Ira sat by the fire.

As he rose, Ruby marvelled she had not guessed him to be her cousin at the first sight of him, for his resemblance to her own father was striking.

"My son!" said the Squire to Ruby, utterly ignoring any previous acquaintance of the cousins, which made her think Ira had kept silence on their meeting on the common, for which she felt grateful. "My son," this in a different tone to Ira, "this is my brother's only child, Ruby. You two ought to be

acquainted, for you are the last of the Nortons, the sole representatives of a grand old family."

Ira looked into the fire. He did not offer to shake hands.

Ruby said lightly,—

"I am afraid I'm not very grateful for my privileges. I never could see why old families and old china were so much thought of."

Ira laughed.

"Take care; you will horrify my father."

"Uncle John knows I speak my mind," said Ruby, coolly. "We both agreed the other night plainspeaking was most comfortable."

"Mrs. Gordon won't be of your mind," said Ira, gravely. "Pray, father, is your housekeeper as urban and silky as ever?"

The old man—he was not old in years, but had the looks of such, a much more advanced age than his son's eye.

Ruby, who was near him, fancied she saw a strange look almost of fear cross his face; but he only said,—

"I see very little change in her!"

"I should have thought," observed Ira, "now my cousin is here you might have dispensed with Mrs. Gordon?"

"Ruby would poison me in a week," returned the old man, eagerly. "Don't look angry, child! I only mean you would never understand how to prepare the vegetable diet I require. No, no, Ira! I don't often go contrary to you; but Jane Gordon must stay here!"

"I wish she'd not come back till I'm gone," said Ira, a little sorely. "That woman has the effect of always irritating me, and the worst part of it is people will think I like her. Some one actually suggested the other day I should marry her. Fancy my starting in life with a grown up daughter! It is as ridiculous as linking my name with a woman's I detest."

"We are not alone!" said the Squire, drily.

"Oh, I am sure Ruby agrees with me. Didn't she say something just now in favour of plain-speaking. Well, she didn't believe in that, and like Mrs. Gordon."

They went into dinner. Ruby fancied the Squire gave a sigh as he looked at the many candles and dainty dishes, but he behaved as though it were quite a matter of course; pressed Ruby to eat quite amiably, and when she rose asked her to pour out coffee later in the library.

The gentlemen soon followed her. Ruby felt like a creature in a dream. It was almost ten. Usually at this hour she was in bed; now she was in her best attire, dispensing coffee that would not have disgraced a French cook.

Hark! the sound of wheels dashing up the avenue at a very different pace from the Squire's equipage—a hammering at the door penetrating even to the library.

"Mrs. Gordon has come home late!" said Ira.

The Squire looked anywhere but at his son. He tried twice to speak, and stopped. At last he said hurriedly.—

"And, really, I forgot to mention it, Ira; but she brings her daughter with her. I think you knew Cynthia as a child?"

"I did not," said Ira, sharply, "and I have no wish to know her now. I——"

He was interrupted—the library door opened. The servants, who detested Mrs. Gordon, had not troubled to tell her of Ira's arrival.

No doubt she expected to find the Squire, with one candle, poring over his books in his shabby dressing-gown. She saw a blaze of light, and three people amiably taking coffee apparently on the best of terms with each other.

There was nothing in this spectacle that ought to have annoyed the housekeeper, and yet her face was livid with rage as she took in the scene; and dragging forward a short, awkward-looking girl, she almost threw her into the Squire's arms, saying—

"This is Cynthia. I have brought her home!"

The stress on the last word was unmistakable. The Squire shook hands with the young lady and muttered something; but Ira simply raised the heavy velvet curtains and disclosed another door at the opposite end of the room.

"I think you and I are slightly out of place here, Ruby!" he said to his cousin. "We are not required to assist at Miss Gordon's 'home-coming.' I daresay you will be glad to go to bed. This door leads to the grand staircase."

Mrs. Gordon followed them with a look of fiercer hatred.

Ira held Ruby's hand for a moment when they were in the hall.

"I hope I have not annoyed you. I foresaw a stormy scene, and I thought you best out of it."

"Oh, yes!" said poor Ruby, who was fairly trembling; "but what does it mean? Why did Mrs. Gordon look at me like that?"

He still held her hand.

"That is the question I have asked myself for a dozen years, Ruby. You are a Norton, and I can trust you. My father, in his heart, dislikes Jane Gordon as much as I do, yet he keeps her here. Do you wonder I stay away, and only come to the Court for rare, short visits? It outrages every feeling of my nature to see that woman here. My father, who I think would give his own life to please me, yet refuses to dismiss her. Can you wonder I ask myself, what does it mean?"

#### CHAPTER IV.

RUBY went upstairs to her own room in a state of utter bewilderment. Was it possible that only this morning she had looked forward to a day at Combe Magnus Vicarage as the height of dissipation? What lots of things had happened in the last twelve hours! and what did Mrs. Gordon mean by bringing her daughter to the Court and calling it her home?

Miss Norton had not heard very much of her cousin, and that little had predisposed her to dislike him; but when she sat down by the fire to think over all that had happened, her whole sympathies were with Ira.

He and she seemed united by a common dislike to the Gordons, and by that peculiar touch of nature which makes kindred who meet even for the first time something more than strangers.

Perhaps the Dyasons hardly did justice to the Squire's heir. The old lawyer and even Tom, while liking Ira personally, always blamed him in their hearts for the state of affairs at the Court.

They knew his fat. Idolised him, and believed that by a little trouble and slight exercise of influence Ira could have changed the miser's *ménage* into the usual establishment of a gentleman of means—have made Norton Court once more hold a proud place among the Westshire magnates.

To their mind Ira neglected every duty of his position, even his father, and roamed about the world an idle pleasure-seeker.

They little knew the truth, which was that from boyhood Ira had detested Mrs. Gordon, and that he simply could not bring himself to linger long in his father's house while she acted as its mistress.

The Squire, indulgent to him in all else, on this point was inflexible; and Ira, who always screened his father's peculiarities as much as possible, preferred to be considered an aimless, desultory wanderer, than to disclose what seemed to him his father's insane infatuation for the widow.

His mother's property brought him in eight hundred a year, and on that he led a pleasant, rambling life. He had visited most European capitals, and knew foreign scenery better far than that of his own land.

He was just a little spoilt by having no positive need for exertion. He might have gained fame as a barrister or a clergyman, for which he did rouse himself; his eloquence was great, and his taking honours at Oxford

proved his ability. But there was about him a strange lack of energy.

He was very fond of his father, but he could not stand Norton Court under its present rule, and so he went his own way. He made many friends on his travels, and if he was a stranger in Belgravian society he was well known enough at Paris and Vienna.

Tom Dyason was right in his surmises.

Ira knew nothing of the real cause of the enmity between his father and Ruby's. A pretty, delicate boy, he had been quite given over to the care of his mother's old nurse until he went to Eton, and though John Norton's projected marriage and subsequent disappointment were widely known, they never reached the little village where his heir was brought up.

At Eton and Oxford the peculiar hauteur and reserve of the boy and man prevented any one carrying him that story of the past. He was well aware he had an uncle—a hopeless ne'er-do-well who resided abroad, but of the ne'er-do-well's having wife or child he never dreamed.

He often wondered over his father's strange, eccentric ways. As he said to Ruby, he never came to Norton without asking himself "what it meant?" He had even let the suspicion cross him once that the Squire in a moment's folly had married Jane Gordon, and his subservience to the lady was the price of her keeping the secret.

Romantic and far-fetched as this may sound, at one time Ira was far from thinking it an idle fancy. However, of late he had dismissed the idea, for in the last three years he had perceived Mrs. Gordon's end and aim was to bring about a match between himself and her daughter. This, to his mind, disposed of the other theory.

He had seen Cynthia once in her childhood, but had no clear remembrance of her. However, if he had loved her passionately, nothing would have induced him to become her mother's son-in-law, and so he considered himself pretty safe.

He felt sure Mrs. Gordon would bring about a meeting between them; but he never dreamed she would go so far as to bring Cynthia to the Court and tell her it was her home.

Ruby sat up till the small hours of the morning trying to solve the mystery which seemed to pervade Norton Court, then she went to sleep with the consolatory reflection her solitary dinners were over for the present.

It was rather a problem where she was to breakfast, but Priscilla called in early to tell her she was expected downstairs.

Ruby wondered whether Mrs. Gordon and Cynthia would be there; her delight at the idea of a companion had faded since her glimpse of Cynthia. There was nothing prepossessing about her, and to Ruby's mind her face seemed cunning.

Ira met his cousin at the door of the room where they had dined the evening before.

"My father is never about so early," he said simply, "so we shall be *late* *late*."

Ruby took her place before the coffee-pot and asked, rather mischievously,

"And Mrs. Gordon?"

"Mrs. Gordon is busy about domestic matters, her daughter is in bed. Really, Ruby, it is not often wishes are gratified so promptly as yours; it was only yesterday you were wishing Miss Cynthia would come here."

Ruby pouted.

"I don't think I shall like her."

"And I am sure I shall not."

"I wonder if Uncle John invited her?"

"No!"

"And how long will she stay?"

"Longer than either of us, I expect. Now, don't let us discuss them any longer; what are you going to do this morning?"

"I am going out to spend the day."

Ira opened his eyes.

"Do you mean it. I didn't think there was any people within reach that my father hadn't offended."

"It's the Lester at Combe Magna. Uncle John said I could go provided they didn't come here."

"Amisses. And did they consent to the terms?"

"Oh, yes. Mr. Lester is not even coming here for me; I am to meet him at the parsonage."

"At what time?"

"Eleven."

"Then I had better see you safely there in case you should go wandering over any more commons. I daresay Mr. Lester will give me a seat as far as the town; I want to do some shopping."

"You! I thought men hated shopping?"

"Well, it's necessary; evil sometimes."

"And do you know Mr. Lester?"

"A little. I am too much of a rover to know anyone here very well. He is a good man, so is Ward. It has struck me as odd sometimes, with two such excellent men within reach, my father should ever have drifted into this life."

"Do you know what Miss Ward asked me yesterday? Perhaps I ought not to tell you, though."

"I haven't an idea, but you may trust me, however mysterious it is."

So Ruby told him the kind old maid's fears of Mrs. Gordon, and he listened attentively.

"No," he said, firmly, "I have thought of that, but it's not so. Both Grey and Dyason have told me my father keeps his money matters entirely under his own control, and that he is as clear-headed a man as they ever met."

Mr. Lester welcomed the cousin warmly, and gladly gave Ira the desired "lift," but tried to persuade him to come and dunch at the Vicarage before he did his shopping.

"No, thank you. I have a good bit to do, but I will call for my cousin later on. I don't think she is capable of taking herself back safely to the Court, and I'm sure your pony won't want the journey there again."

The day passed quickly. Mrs. Lester and Blanche made much of their guest, and petted her to her heart's content.

It was growing late when wheels were heard, and Ira Norton drove up to the door in a stylish dog-cart, drawn by a fine grey mare, the ubiquitous Andrew behind him.

"Where did you get it?" demanded Ruby, when she had been assisted to the seat beside her cousin and they were driving off.

"I really forgot. I bought it two or three years ago, but it mostly repose in livery stables."

"I meant how did you get it here?"

"I sent Andrew off with a telegram the first thing this morning, and they put it on the twelve o'clock train. I meant only to stay two or three days, but I must wait and see what Miss Cynthia is up to. I can't walk nine miles every time I want to go to town, and I've told you before I don't admire my father's taste in horseflesh."

"But you said he didn't like you to drive home in other people's vehicles."

"But this happens to be my own. My father has seen it two or three times. He nearly had a fit when I bought it, and told me a whole family might be kept on the price for—I forget how long."

"It is a lovely horse!"

"Pretty fair. I suppose she'll find room in the stable, and that venerable David can see to her."

"Are we going to dine late to-night?" asked Ruby, demurely.

"At half-past seven. The reign of solitary repasts is ended, and here his face darkened, "Mrs. Gordon and her daughter will give us their company. My father sent for me this morning, and said it must be so. I had a great mind to go back to London there and then, but it would have been a great disappointment to him."

"And Mrs. Gordon can't hurt you!"

"I suppose not," said Ira, doubtfully. "Tigers are very nice animals after they have

been tamed, but still, you know, they keep their claws, and I wouldn't trust one too far."

"Then you think—"

Ira shook his head.

"Very few aversions are one-sided. I have cordially detested Mrs. Gordon for years, and I honestly believe the sentiment is mutual."

"Then she dislikes me, too?"

"Undoubtedly. The look she cast on you last night proved that. How have you contrived to offend her, Ruby?"

"I don't know."

"Well," said Ira, quietly, "it's not worth troubling over. While I'm at the Court she shall not hurt you. What nonsense I am talking. We don't live in the days of daggers and caps of cold poison. However much our fair housekeeper dislikes you she can't really do you an injury."

The drawing-room was opened to-night, and, when Ruby went downstairs, she found it already tenanted by Mrs. Gordon and her daughter.

Evidently the widow had changed her tactics, for the kindly Miss Norton officially, (which made that young lady secretly indignant), and exclaimed—

"I am sorry you have been out all day. Cynthia has been longing to know you. My sweet girl, this is Ruby Norton."

"Miss Norton," corrected Ruby, very quietly. "Perhaps it is a foreign fashion, but I have never been called 'Ruby' by strangers. Are you quite rested after your journey, Miss Gordon?"

Cynthia drawled that she still felt tired. Evidently her rôle was that of a languid fine lady.

Ruby looked at her, and then pitied her mother, that all her affection, all her care, (and she could see there had been no lack of either) should have produced this.

Cynthia Gordon was really the same age as Ruby, but looked some years older. Her figure was square set, and too matronly for her age. Her complexion was leaden, and, though art had been called in to assist it, the roses on her cheeks looked startling by the side of her thick, mucky skin. Her hair was the same shade as her mother's. Her eyes also matched Mrs. Gordon's. Dressed in a thick, dark velvet or warm, useful cashmere, Cynthia might have passed muster as an ordinary girl, but decked out in white muslin and blue ribbons, every fault of form and feature was revealed, and she looked almost a caricature.

It was for this girl Mrs. Gordon had schemed, plotted—ay, and sinned. It never dawned on her it would have been better to work honestly for a livelihood, and keep her child with her.

Cynthia had been at a very expensive school, but the principal, speedily seeing she was not likely to be a credit to the establishment, had neglected her, and her mother's periodical visits were so rare she never even discovered how little return was made for the expensive fees.

It had been the housekeeper's wish the girl should leave school at seventeen; but the Squire had refused to have her at the Court; and afraid to push him to extremities, Mrs. Gordon had placed her daughter as boarder in a private family until such time as she could commence the siege to Ira Norton's heart.

The family were poor and unscrupulous. They were well paid for Cynthia, and knew that if she complained to her mother they would lose her. So they flattered her in all things; till the poor, foolish girl really believed she was a beauty and a genius, instead of being gifted with but scanty charms of face and mind.

And now here she was in the Squire's house, and every creature there—except Ruby Norton—knew she had been brought with but one object—that she might marry the heir. It was patent to everyone except Ruby, and she honestly never dreamt of it. She was not one of those girls who can think of nothing but love and lovers; she knew, of course, that both Cynthia and Ira were of marriageable age, but the idea that Mrs. Gordon meant

them to become husband and wife never entered her head.

It seemed the longest ten minutes Ruby had ever spent, but it was over at last, and the gentlemen entered together. Cynthia, with an affection of childishness which ill became her, ran to put herself on a stool at the Squire's feet, where, which greatly amused Ruby, he found her considerably in the way.

Ira bowed slightly to mother and daughter before he crossed over to his cousin's side. Their eyes met, and each knew the other's opinion of Cynthia without a word. But Mrs. Gordon promptly separated them.

"I think dinner is late," she said, affably. "Miss Norton, would you please ring the bell?"

Ira crossed the room, and rang it himself. Ruby leant back in her low chair, and wondered why he looked so cross.

Andrew announced dinner, and Ira calmly offered his arm to Ruby, so point blank disregarding his father's meaning glance at Cynthia, that the Squire could only suppose he had not seen it; and himself took in mother and daughter, to find Miss Gordon's place laid in military grandeur on one side, while the cousins were together opposite her.

But Cynthia, at least, was agreeable to her mother's wishes. Her girl, putting such trifles as modesty and maidenly reserve aside, set herself to attract a man. Miss Gordon was that girl, and poor Ira that man. In his father's house he could not treat her as he wished; but the cold, haughty reserve of his manner, the indifferent monosyllables of his answers, must have known any one less intently concited, that her efforts were thrown away.

Ruby was wretched enough to enjoy the patient resignation of his face. She herself talked but little, and that little to her uncle. She could hear Ira's sigh of relief when Mrs. Gordon gave the girls a signal to retire, but she could not know the bitter reproof with which he turned to the Squire when they two were left alone.

"Father, I am not a child. I think I have a right to your confidence. Why is that girl here?"

"Ruby?" echoed John Norton, honestly mistaking the question. "Why, you see, I—she has no other relations, and, though I am a poor man, I could hardly refuse a shelter to my own niece."

"You would have been unworthy your name if you could have thought of it!" said Ira, warmly. "My cousin has every right to share our home. But I did not mean her. What brings Cynthia Gordon to the Court?"

"Her mother wanted her. They have been parted a good many years, and Cynthia is an only child. Naturally they want to be together."

"Why can't they be together somewhere else?"

"I am used to Jane's ways."

"My dear father," said Ira, repressing the passionate words that rose to his lips, and speaking calmly by a mighty effort, "I know you have led a secluded life for years, but you mixed in society once. Tell me, what would you have thought of any girl who visited your house in my mother's lifetime, and behaved to an unmarried man as Cynthia Gordon behaved to me to-night?"

"Times are changed, Ira. Even in the best circles girls are a little fast."

"Some may be. I have known girls fond of horses and dogs, and adepts at billiards; but they were ladies still, though perhaps hoydens; but this Miss Gordon is quite another master. Why?"—and Ira got red, despite his thirty years—"she was almost making love to me at this dinner-table!"

The Squire drank a glass of claret, and did not answer.

"His silence provoked his son."

"It seems to me, sir, this young person—I can call her lady—has come here for the purpose of courting—I must speak plain English—me, and with your approval."

"You must marry some day, Ira."

"I see no necessity for it," said Ira, coldly. "But granted I must, I should never marry a woman who behaved as Cynthia did to-night. Father, once more, tell me what strange power this Mrs. Gordon possesses over you? It seems to me you dare not defy her; that you—if you could—would rather make me miserable for life by marrying me to Cynthia Gordon than displease your housekeeper by the defeat of her plans."

"It is an old scheme now, Ira," said the Squire, feebly; "made years ago, when you were a boy."

Ira's lips curled.

"Do you mean to tell me, sir, you honestly wish to see Cynthia Gordon mistress of the Court?—to see her in my mother's place?"

"Yes."

"And you have promised Mrs. Gordon to bring it about, if within your power?"

"Yes."

A long, long silence.

"I have heard," said Ira, at last, bitterly, "of two people being plighted to each other in childhood to secure a disputed property. I have heard of cousins being betrothed so as not to divide an estate; but I never yet heard of a wealthy man—and you are that—pledging his word to his housekeeper that his only son should marry her daughter. Besides, in the case of youthful engagements the agreement is always known to the parties most concerned. You might at least have told me of the destiny awaiting me!"

"I was afraid it would cloud your youth."

Ira smiled curiously.

"Did it never occur to you, sir, I might fall in love?"

"No; you never cared for women. Her mother warned Cynthia long ago. For years she has regarded herself as your future wife."

"Then she had better disabuse herself of the notion at once. I shall never marry her. Were she the only woman in the world I would not make her my wife!"

"Ira!"

The bitter anguish of the cry, its acute despair, went to the young man's heart.

"I would do very much for you, father, but not this thing. I will not swear to love and cherish a creature I despise. But," he added, quickly, horrified at the terror stamped on his father's face, "in all else I will do as you wish. You shall choose everything in my life for me—except my wife."

"That won't help me!"

"It meets! Listen! I will ask no questions," his honest face flushed with shame.

"I don't want you to tell me why Mrs. Gordon has such influence over you; it is enough for me she has it. She possesses some secret—shall we call it—of yours, and her price for keeping it is that her daughter shall be mistress of Norton Court."

The miser nodded.

"It is for that I pinched and scraped," he said, feebly. "It is for that I have lived like a labourer, and cut off every innocent enjoyment from my household. I want to buy her off!"

There was nothing but pity now on Ira's face. He put one hand tenderly on his father's arm.

"And she refused?"

"I offered her fifty thousand pounds money down only yesterday, and she said she'd rather see her daughter Mrs. Norton. Ira, I blame me, I can see; but I have tried all these years to buy her off."

"I should let her do her worst!"

"Ira!"

The terror, the dismay, the anguish painted on the withered face was pitiful. The old man wrung his hands.

"The disgrace would kill me!"

Ira shuddered.

Was this strange fear a monomania, or had his father's past really some guilty secret which the housekeeper could expose? He longed to know.

"I wish you would leave me to deal with her!"



[IRA AND RUBY—AN EVENTFUL DRIVE.]

" You ! I would rather the whole world knew the truth than you ! "

Ira saw further entreaties would only distress him.

" Then we must try another plan," he said, cheerfully. " Tell Mrs. Gordon to-morrow I respectfully decline her daughter's hand; but that I resign all claims on Norton Court in favour of Miss Cynthia. Thus you can keep your promise, father. Miss Gordon will be mistress of the Court, and free from the encumbrance of an unloving husband."

But the offer, generous and disinterested as it was, seemed to hold no consolation for Squire Norton.

" It is not as though you cared for any one else," he said, irritably. " I have often heard you say you should never fall in love. If you married Cynthia you could leave her here with her mother while you travelled about where you liked. You would be rich enough to afford two establishments ! "

Ira's lip curled.

" My idea of domestic felicity differs from yours, father. Pray, did you entertain these views when you married my mother ? "

" She was a good woman," said the Squire, feelingly, " and we never had a quarrel; but there was no romantic affection on either side. My uncle wanted me to marry Lady Anne, and her connections seemed likely to advance my interests in Parliament. I was young then, you see, and ambitious. Respect and esteem were what your mother and I married on, Ira, and we didn't turn out badly."

" Well," said Ira, slowly, " I neither respect nor esteem Miss Gordon, and I would rather beg my bread than marry a woman I did not love—ay, or one who did not love me back again ! "

" I should never have suspected you of such romantic sentiments," sneered the Squire.

" I daresay not; but, sir, we are here to discuss not my feelings, but your position

regarding Mrs. Gordon. Will you tell her I decline the hand of Miss Cynthia, or shall I ? "

Then came such passionate entreaties, that Ira relented so far as to promise he would say nothing to Mrs. Gordon on the subject.

" Only give Cynthia a fair trial," pleaded John Norton. " You may change your mind about her."

" I shall never do that. I will say nothing to Mrs. Gordon if your heart is set on my silence; but, remember, I can't promise to pay the girl any attention, and, if anyone taxes me with the engagement I shall deny it at once."

The time had passed very slowly in the drawing-room. Cynthia had had a nap, Mrs. Gordon delivered a long lecture to Ruby on the impropriety of young ladies driving about the country with strange gentlemen, which made the girl's cheeks grow hot, though the widow worded her harangue so cautiously her victim could not show resentment.

But there was a tired, *distracte* look on the girl's face, which Ira noticed the moment he entered the room; also that, with a general "good-night," she managed to slip away, while he was dexterously kept in a corner by Mrs. Gordon.

He wondered if they had dared to annoy her, and grew angry at the bare idea. He would have said he meant to be kind to Ruby because he was her kinsman, and she was alone in the world; but, perhaps, he would have felt just as interested in her had she been a stranger, with relations of her own.

Mrs. Gordon misinterpreted the dark look on his face, and thought he was vexed at his cousin's abrupt departure.

" You must not be hard on her," she simpered. " Poor girl ! Considering her foreign training, I think she is wonderfully quiet and inoffensive."

" Miss Norton is a lady," said Ira, coldly, " and would be thought charming in any society. Perhaps you are not aware, Mrs.

Gordon, that the highest families in the land send their daughters abroad to be educated?"

" But not to live in a fifth rate Parisian suburb, with a drunken gambler of a father."

The Squire had left the room. Ira turned on the widow with flashing eyes.

" Madam," he said, haughtily, " remember, if you please, that you are speaking of a Norton. Unhappily, divisions separated my father and his brother, but I will not hear it insinuated that my uncle did anything unworthy of an officer and a gentleman. The Squire looks upon his orphan daughter as a sacred trust, and we neither of us choose to have her criticised."

Mrs. Gordon raised her eyebrows.

" Dear me ! You are a warm partisan. I suppose some people would call the girl a gentleman's beauty; but I never did care for those black and white faces. I like a good English style, fair hair and rosy cheeks."

" Tastes differ," said Ira, coolly. " I always admired black and white beauty, as you term it; and now I will say good-night, for I know my father is waiting for me to read to him."

(To be continued.)

Hope is often but a trifler, robbing us of energies and withdrawing us from our work that we may dream. But Christian hope is an armed warrior, grave and calm, ready for conflict, because assured of victory. Our hope, if it be perfect, will "teach our hands to war and our fingers to fight;" will put vigour into us for service; will teach us scorn of all things foul and worldly. It will be as wings to lift us above cares and sorrows, and as weights to keep us down to common tasks. It will make us strong to do and patient to suffer, wise to understand, and willing to accept all the will of our Father God.



[IN AT THE DEATH.]

## NOVELLETTE.

## A MIDSUMMER MADNESS

—:—

## CHAPTER I.

Borne by soft breezes towards the wished-for haven."

"My dear mother," exclaimed Mary Marston impatiently, "for Heaven's sake stop this badgering, or you will drive me mad!"

"It's all very well for you to talk in that way," retorted Mrs. Marston, with an angry sniff. "You haven't to worry yourself continually about ways and means, to wonder every month if you can make both ends meet, and if you can't, how you can manage to still clamour tradespeople's tongues?"

"I don't escape scot-free," observed the rebellious daughter.

"You haven't much to trouble you," declared her parent, wrathfully.

"Is it no trouble to be told every day of my life that I must sell myself for gold—sell myself like a good or a chattel, to the highest bidder in the matrimonial market, and throw inclination, honour, and honesty to the four winds for them to sport with?"

"Don't talk nonsense, Mary!" said Mrs. Marston sharply, a flush rising to her hard, handsome face. "How many girls marry for a home and position nowadays that money is so scarce—?"

"And morality also," put in the girl, scornfully.

"Pshaw! that's the high-flown kind of nonsense your father used to indulge in. And, at any rate, Mary, it's time now you should look matters fairly in the face, and understand distinctly that you *must* marry a wealthy man. I want you to make the most of this time we are going to spend at the Renshaws, and to promise me you won't waste your time with detrimentala."

"I can't make any promises of the barter and sell kind," replied the girl coldly.

"Oh, Mary, do stop that rubbish! How can you be so stubborn and ungrateful of all my pinching and slaving for you? Is all my toil and labour to go for nothing now, just because you are mad enough to fancy Mark Mavis, a man who has hardly anything save his pay—and that's beggarly enough in a marching regiment?"

"Let us leave Major Mavis's name out of the discussion, mother, please."

"Of course, you don't want to discuss him with me!"

"No, I do not."

"Well, let me tell you, you must put all thought of him out of your head."

"Supposing I won't?" asked the girl defiantly, as she faced round and confronted her mother; and as they stood facing each other the strong likeness between them was apparent—only Mrs. Marston's face was more haughty than her daughter's, and her expression was hard and cold, while, when Mary smiled, her whole countenance became soft, and sweet, and alluring.

"You will when I tell you that we are on the brink of ruin!"

"Ruin, mother!"

"Yes, ruin."

"But—but I don't understand," a bewildered look clouding the lovely grey eyes, that sought her mother's face so anxiously. "Father left you something!"

"A paltry three hundred a-year!" with scathing contempt.

"Well?"

"Well, do you think that sum would keep us as we have lived during the last four years?"

"I don't know."

"No, I don't suppose you do. You wore the pretty dresses and things I provided, went into society and enjoyed yourself, without giving a thought to ways and means!"

"I thought you such a good manager, mother!" exclaimed Mary, apologetically.

"Perhaps I am. At any rate, you've cut a dash in the fashionable world. I managed that, but it must all come to an end now, unless you marry well—remember that. This visit to the Renshaw's is a last, expiring effort. After that we must disappear from the *beau monde* that knows us. You will have to go into a shop like Jay's and show off mantles on your fine figure, and I shall look out for a place as housekeeper to an elderly gentleman."

"Mother!"

"It's no use exclaiming 'mother.' It's the truth—the bare, bald, unpalatable truth, and the sooner you take my advice to heart and act on it the better;" and with this last piece of admonition Mrs. Marston swept out of the room, leaving her beautiful daughter to her own reflections, which were anything save pleasant.

"Must I really sell myself for filthy lucre?" murmured the belle, walking up to the mirror hanging over the mantelshelf, and scanning her lovely reflection therein. "Am I to barter the beauty I've been so proud of for a house and money, jewels and fine clothes, a good settlement for myself, and a liberal allowance for mother? Pah! It seems horrible to think of tying myself to some old, withered wretch I should scorn before marriage, and loathe and hate after. And yet—and yet—if it be true that I must become a shop-girl, and work hard for a living, the uncongenial spouse seems the better choice. I'm not fitted for hard work, and shouldn't like roughing it;" and she glanced down at the pretty, fur-trimmed dress she wore, and then round the dainty room with its innumerable nick-nacks, and tasty trifles.

Mrs. Marston's house, though small, was furnished throughout with great taste and nicety, and with a due regard for comfort. She had had an eye for appearances when she left the country town — where she had lived

until Mary reached her sixteenth year—on economical principles, and determined to launch her young daughter on the world of fashion with every advantage she possibly—by hook or by crook—could procure her. She managed to save a hundred pounds by dint of scraping, and denying herself even trifling luxuries, and with this sum she furnished the little house at Bayswater, having but few things to bring from their country lodgings. Her taste was perfect, and Mary's slender fingers were clever at fancy work, and she made many dainty trifles that gave an appearance of elegance to their Liliputian drawing-room and many richer folk envied Mrs. Marston her artistic and pretty rooms, where there was nothing to offend the most sensitive eye.

The house arranged and ready for guests, she next turned her attention to her daughter's rather limited wardrobe, and by judicious management, and the help of Mrs. Judkin—a servant who had lived with her in the palmy days of her husband's lifetime, and who was as clever as any French *Assagai* in the trimming of hats and bonnets, and the shaping and making of gowns and mantles—Mary soon had a wardrobe that equalled in quantity that of many a richer maid, and surpassed some in elegance and style.

When she first appeared in London society the fortune-hunters thought they had another quarry to chase, so stylish and elegant was her appearance on every occasion but inquiry elicited the fact that, like the milkmaid in the nursery rhyme, her face was her fortune, and that there was nothing to back it. However, despite that fact, she had no lack of admirers, and some lovers presented themselves, only some of them did not find favour with her mother on account of the lightness of their purses, and others she objected to on account of their age, or vulgarity, or some objectionable trait which did not escape her observant eyes; and so after four seasons she was still Miss Marston, to her mother's unspeakable dismay.

Funds had been growing beautifully less, and now ruin stared them in the face, and she would have to make up her mind to give her hand to one or other of her rich, elderly admirers.

Her heart was already engaged. A certain Mark Mavis, a young major in a fine regiment, quartered at Hounslow, had won, what many others sighed for in vain, the love of beautiful Mary Marston; but as he was poor, like herself, and knew something of her mother's views for her, he had abstained from actually asking her to be his wife, though there was a tacit understanding between the two—that subtle knowledge people get of each other's hearts and thoughts when they love very dearly—and he knew she loved him, and he knew he worshipped the ground she trod on. And there it was; and life seemed all nines and sevens to the girl as she sat that chill winter afternoon, gazing dreamily at the glowing embers, thinking of Mark, and longing for the esp of Fortunatus, that she might wish herself a wealthy woman.

Her meditations were interrupted by the entrance of a servant who announced "Captain Clutterby," and departed swiftly.

Now, Richard, better known as Dick Clutterby, was a relation of the Marstons—a distant cousin; and by reason of this cousinship, he concerned himself very narrowly with their affairs, and was in the habit of walking into the little Bayswater villa at any time of the day, and whenever his chief would give him leave, which was not seldom, for Dick was a good and conscientious soldier, and did his duty thoroughly, and his colonel was always ready to give him leave than any other officer in the regiment. So Dick had a good time of it, and made the most of his opportunities, improving the golden opportunity, and his acquaintance with his lovely but capricious cousin.

He had known and seen but little of her during her youth, but on the arrival of his regiment from India, the year after she ap-

peared on the stage of London society, he hastened to resume his slight acquaintance with Mary and her mother. He was welcomed warmly by both ladies; by the younger because she had always kept a pleasant memory of the great, good-natured boy, who, when he had come to visit them at the little town of Parr, loaded her with sweets and toys, carried her on his shoulder, and dispensed himself for her amusement generally, somewhat after the fashion of an ungainly mastiff pup. By the elder, because he was the possessor of between seven and eight hundred a-year; and though it would have had to multiply to thousands before she would have considered him a suitable aspirant for her daughter's hand, still she saw her way to making use of him, and knew she could accept him, the use of his horses, a set in his phaeton, and other things from a relative, although she had no idea of receiving him in the shape of a son-in-law.

So, metaphorically speaking, Captain Dick was patted on the back and made much of at Bayswater-square, received as *ami de la maison*, and promised to escort the beauty and her mamma to entertainment, and bear them about. But, somehow or other, when any eligible old fogey appeared on the scene, or any young puppy, blessed with a superabundance of cash, Mrs. Marston, like unto an octopus, would put forth her tentacles, and poor Dick would find himself somehow or other clasped to her side and unable to escape from her clutches.

But Dick was good nature itself, and after a few ineffectual attempts to regain Mary's side, he would yield himself up to the inevitable, and listen placidly to Mrs. Marston's conversation.

Yet, notwithstanding this outward calmness, Captain Clutterby loved his young cousin with all the strength and fervour of his quiet, intense nature. He had never loved before—he would never love again. All his hopes, aspirations, interests centred in her, and though few outsiders would have guessed it from his quiet manner, his only chance of earthly happiness lay in the hollow of those girlish, slender hands.

"Why, Dick, this is a surprise!" exclaimed Mary, rising to greet him smilingly. "Who would have expected to see you at this hour?"

"Not you, evidently, Mary," grasping her hand in his close, warm clasp, and holding it longer than was absolutely necessary.

"No, it is such a wretched afternoon!" and she glanced with a little shudder out at the snow-shrouded streets.

"I don't mind the weather much," he laughed, "especially when I am coming to see you!"

"I think I should mind going to Hounslow in that biting north-wind."

"I daresay you would—women are different from men; and then your skirts would get in no end of a mess from the snow."

"I suppose they would," she returned, a little absently, still looking out at the snow that was falling softly and silently, the firelight glowing on her beautiful face, tinging the cheeks with its rosy glow.

"Well, have you any news?" she asked, suddenly, looking up at him, and encountering the full glance of his blue eyes, that had something new in them, or, at any rate, something she had never noticed in them before.

"Not much," he replied, drawing a little nearer and leaning his arm on the mantelpiece. "Life progresses much the same as usual at Hounslow. And you, have you none?"

"Very little; town seems dull now."

"The natural reaction after the Christmas festivities."

"Yes, I suppose so. However, we are going to the country next week."

"Aye you?" he exclaimed, in some surprise. "Where are you going?"

"To Ravensden Grange."

"The Renshaws?"

"Yes."

"I have an invitation there, too, and some other fellows of ours."

"Really? It will be very nice to meet there!" and the grey eyes sparkled, and the lips parted tremulously, and he half fancied the pleasure shown was at the prospect of meeting him, but she was thinking of Mark Mavis.

"Won't it?—jolly!" he agreed, heartily.

"They're very nice people."

"Do you know them well?"

"Yes, they are old friends. Have you been to the Ganges before?"

"No, this is our first visit. We only met them last season at the Cliftons."

"I see. Well, I'm sure you will enjoy yourself at their place. They always have nice people and plenty of fun going on; and then he has a splendid stud, so any one who fond of hunting can indulge his or her taste for it."

"That will just suit me!" exclaimed Mary, with animation.

"Yes, you are a sort of female Nimrod," he smiled, "and would ride anything."

"Of course I would!" she replied, promptly, with an answering smile; "that is the great drawback to being poor. One can't keep horses, and enjoy the greatest pleasure in life."

"It is a great pleasure," he said, musingly, wondering if she would be content to share his modest eight hundred a-year, on which he thought he could keep her one horse.

"Of course it is! Does Maggie Renshaw ride much?"

"No, she is rather timid. Those blue-eyed fair little things generally are."

"What she loses!" cried Mary. "There's nothing better than a ringing gallop on a fine morning."

"Everyone hasn't your nerve, Coz."

"And everyone hasn't her opportunities. The only child of rich people who adore her, and are ready to gratify every whim and fancy, she might have a trio of horses any woman would envy!"

"She might, but you see she doesn't care about it."

"It's always the way," declared Mary, a little pettishly. "Those who can have every luxury under the sun can't appreciate their good fortune, while those with a keen appreciation of all good things have to do with next to nothing."

"Fortune of war," laughed Dick. "And she's an awfully good little thing: gives away a lot in charity, and is just the sunshine of her mother and father's home."

"And is quite ready to be the sunshine of yours, Dick," smiled his companion.

"Oh, Mary, what rubbish!" protested the young man. But, nevertheless, his honest face crimsoned up to the roots of his bright, fair hair.

"Why don't you go in and win?" continued Miss Marston, calmly. "She is pretty enough and sweet enough to make any man love her for herself without giving a thought to the substantial dowry she will have."

"I quite agree with you there. But, you see, I don't love her."

"No; and yet I am sure she is very fond of you, Dick."

"I hope for her sake she isn't, and in this life we very seldom fall in love with the right person."

"That is true enough. Yet I can't imagine why you shouldn't love such a pretty, taking girl, especially when she has shown her preference so plainly."

"Because I love you, Mary," returned the young man, quietly.

"Me, Dick!"

Surprise and dismay unlimited rang in Miss Marston's voice, and reigned in her face and manner.

"Yes! Have you never guessed how much I cared for you, dear?" bending his eyes earnestly on her.

"No, Dick. I—I—never—dreamt that you

loved me!" she stammered, for it had never occurred to her that Clutterby—quiet, unromantic Dick Clutterby—should love her, a woman so different from him in every respect. "I thought you only regarded me with cousinly affection."

"And yet I love you with my whole heart and soul!"

"Oh, Dick, don't—don't say so!" she implored.

"I must, Mary, since it is the truth."

"Oh, Dick, I am so sorry. What can I do?" she asked, lifting a pair of lovely eyes to his, sparkling with the suspicion of tears.

"Nothing, Mary, unless you will marry me," he returned earnestly, but very quietly, as he took her hand, and held it in both his tenderly.

"I can't do that, Dick. I don't love you as a woman should love her husband," she broke out impetuously, "though I am very fond of you, and you know, and I feel it would never do for me to marry a man I did not love intensely."

"I can believe that," he responded in his usual tones, only there was a little hopelessness in them, "and I feared ever since I realised I cared for you so deeply, that I had little or no chance, and—"

"And so you are not disappointed?" she queried eagerly.

"I won't say that. I suppose I hoped fortune would favour me until I heard you say you couldn't marry me."

"And—and—Dick," she began hesitatingly, "you—you know what mother's plans are for me?"

"Yes, dear, I know—a wealthy marriage. But I hope you will be true to yourself, and not be persuaded into an alliance with a man you could not respect."

"I don't know what I shall do," she replied with a little restless gesture, as her mother's words about their being on the brink of ruin recurred to her.

"Well, don't do that; and remember, Mary, if you ever want a friend come to me, and I will do my best to help you in any trouble, let it be what it may."

"Thanks, thanks, Dick. You are good!"

"And don't let what has passed this afternoon, make any difference in our cousinly friendship, or I shall hate myself for having spoken, and let you see that I was fool enough to aspire to your hand."

"Of course I won't, you dear old Dick," she cried warmly; and then, when he was going to show how friendly she was with him, she put her white hands on his shoulders, and as he bent down kissed him.

Some women are cruel unwittingly, and Mary Marston was cruel to Dick Clutterby when she gave him that kiss, for the memory of it lingered with him through many a long day and weary night.

## CHAPTER II.

"The time of lovers is brief,  
From the fair first joy to the grief  
That tells when love is grown old,  
From the warm, wild kiss to the cold."

It was black, bitter winter at Ravensden—the village that was the property of the owner of the Grange—Squire Renshaw, as he was called by the country folk. Many of the old gaffers and gamblers had turned their weary faces to the wall, and gave up struggling with cold, and hunger, and want. Some of the younger ones had fought against their enemies and had pulled through dark December, and still lived now that January had arrived, bringing lengthening days, and a little feeble sunshine, to light up mother earth's wide bosom.

Mrs. Renshaw and her daughter had done their best to help the frost-nipped cronies by presents of blankets, and warm clothing, and strong soups, and other things that they thought might be useful and comforting, and not a day passed without pretty Maggie's face

being seen in the village, driving her little pony phaeton that was put on runners, and glided sledge-wise over the crisp snow, and her basket full ofainties and comforts for the sick folk.

She was loved by all her father's people, and many a blessing was sent after her, as she turned her pony's heads, one chill afternoon, towards the end of January, and having emptied her basket, whipped up her little phaeton steeds, eager to get to the Grange in time for the five-o'clock tea, which was a meal at which much merriment and a certain amount of freedom prevailed; for the Squire, who was a bit of a stickler for the proprieties, seldom appeared at that time, as he voted tea "cat-lap," and swore by the good, nut-brown Kentish ale, that was his daily and favourite beverage.

His absence enabled the younger members of his guests to indulge freely in any little flirtation or *affaire de cœur* they might have in hand, Mrs. Renshaw being no drawback to these little affairs.

She was the kindest-hearted, simplest, best of women, and thought the chief aim of her own sex's life should be the winning of a husband. So she rather aided than retarded love-makers, being at heart an inveterate match-maker.

Lights were glowing from several windows at the Grange as Maggie drew up Kit and Cliff by a dexterous turn of her wrist, and the entrance hall looked pleasant as she paused quickly through it, only pausing for a minute to throw off her long, furred cloak; but it was in the Oak-room, where tea was always dispensed, that the greatest cosiness prevailed.

It was a pleasant, Gothic old room, with a shoulder-high wainscot, and heavily-beamed ceiling, and splendidly carved mantelpiece, all of time-blackened oak. A blazing fire crackled up the wide chimney, round which were grouped ten or a dozen girls, two or three ladies of mature age, and several men, who, owing to the frost had not been able to go out a-hunting, and grumbled accordingly with much vigour.

At one corner was a curious table, enriched by carving, laden with a hissing urn and an array of cups, a glittering silver teapot, a silver cow, with a trap in its tail, which answered the purpose of cream jug, and a variety of tempting cakes, warranted to spoil one's appetite for seven o'clock dinner if freely indulged in.

"Just in time, my dear!" exclaimed Mrs. Renshaw, as her daughter entered. "I'll vacate the post of honour in your favour, or you'll be offended, I know," and, rising with a little laugh, she let Maggie take her accustomed seat behind the urn.

"How nice and cosy it is in here!" said the girl, drawing off her gloves and tossing aside her sealakin cap.

"Very different from outside!" cried Ella Blane, a little, dark-eyed gipsyfied thing.

"Yes; very."

"I can't imagine how you can venture out in such weather," said Mrs. Clifton, languidly, holding a palm leaf between her face and the fire—for she was toasting her feet, and evidently feared for her complexion, which was very fair, almost insipidity so.

She was a large woman, with pale gold hair, big blue eyes and regular features, but her expression was cold, and her whole face "splendidly null."

"My people want me—couldn't do without me, in fact," returned Maggie, with a smile, as she commenced to pour out the tea. "So I must go and see the poor things. Still I am willing to confess that it was an ordeal to-day." And she glanced out of the window at the skeleton bushes and leafless trees, and listened with a little inward shiver to the sound of the bleak wind songhing and sobbing through the bare branches.

"An ordeal! I should think so!" declared the widow, with a flourish of the hand-screen, "I am sure I should never be good at playing the part of Lady Bountiful."

"I think you would," said the girl, gently.

"If you saw these people in dreadful want and distress, and had known them all your life, and taken an interest in all their affairs and occupations!"

"I think not. It is not in my line, that kind of thing." And Mrs. Clifton twisted a bracelet studded with flashing brilliants round and round on her shapely wrist.

"You slander yourself. You would be an angel of mercy!" said the Reverend Horatio Stephens, a fat parson, who had the living of Ravensden, and was on the look-out for a wealthy wife, and had "spotted" Mrs. Clifton, she being a widow of some eighteen months' standing, and having been left very well off by the "dear departed."

"You are a flatterer, Vicar," she smiled, looking at his sleek young face with kindly eyes; for, in common with most of her sex, she affected persons.

"It would be impossible to flatter you!" he whispered.

"I wonder whether the Marstons will come?" mused Mrs. Renshaw.

"It is a terrible day for travelling," responded Maggie.

"Oh, I hope they will!" cried Miss Blane. "I am dying to see Miss Marston."

"Well, don't quite expire," remarked a youth—a great, big, burly fellow, who had barely yet passed the hobbledehoy stage, "because we should be inconsolable."

"Don't be absurd, Roy," retorted Ella, for the hobbledehoy was her cousin.

"I am not absurd!" he declared; "and I assure you," he added, in a whisper, "that Miss Marston is not nearly as pretty as you are!"

"That's only your opinion," she returned, with some contempt. "I've heard that she's lovely."

"So she is," drawled Captain Turner. "But she is very obvious in some things."

"What things?" inquired Ella.

"Well—I can hardly tell you," he said, with some hesitation, which was only natural, as Mary had refused him, and he did not like to publish that, which was her greatest peculiarity in his eyes. "I can't put it in words."

"I know what you mean," grinned Roy. "She's one of those young women who gives the British matron earthquakes, and makes them exclaim—'Oh, my! How dreadful!' at least three times a day."

"What do you mean by earthquakes, Roy?" inquired Ella, who, never having been to London, or seen anything of the wicked world of fashion and frivolity, was naturally very curious about any member of it that she had heard talked of.

"Well, she makes them open their eyes—astound them."

"How?"

"Oh, she does things that other people don't do."

"What are they?"

"Plays billiards."

"And plays cards well," put in Turner.

"Rides to hounds in the most reckless, breakneck, mannish fashion."

"She has a wonderful seat, and wonderful nerve," sighed the Captain, who still secretly adored the woman who had rejected his suit, and the offer of his battered heart and rakish reputation with scorn.

"Then she's an awful flirt?"

"Ah!—yes. Leads a fellow on to think she's dying in love with him, and then laughs at him."

"And does heaps of queer-mannish things?"

"What a funny woman she must be!" said Ella. "I am more curious than ever to see her."

"Your curiosity will be gratified in a few minutes," remarked the daughter of the house, coldly, for she did not like to have her friend talked about in such a fashion. "I see lights coming up the drive; it must be the brougham that we sent to the station to meet them!"

And so it proved to be, for in a few minutes

the door was thrown open, and Mrs. Marston sailed in, followed by her daughter. Both ladies wore long velvet mantles, profusely trimmed with fur; and from the air of distinction which was peculiar to both of them, and their general appearance, it might easily have been inferred that they were very well off, and belonged to a family of some note and position.

Mrs. Renshaw and Maggie rose to receive their guests, and welcomed them warmly, Maggie kissing Mary to show the backbiters that she was on very friendly terms with her, and all the men who had any acquaintance at all with her pressed forward to greet her, while little Ella Blane regarded her with eyes full of wonder and admiration, and Mrs. Clifton with malice and envy, though she preserved an outwardly smiling aspect, and actually rose and gave Mary the comfortable easy chair in the angle nook in which she had been toasting her comely person.

"A terrible day for a journey, isn't it?" she said, with her false, cold smile, mentally appraising the value of the sables Mary wore.

"Yes, travelling in slow owing to the snow. But we hardly felt the cold; we were well wrapped up, and had foot-warmers."

"Still, that doesn't keep the frost out."

"We had Captain Clutterby's buffalo robe as well, and we found it infallible against the cold."

"Was Captain Clutterby with you?" asked the widow, a tinge of surprise in her silky tones.

"Yes. My cousin accompanied us," returned Mary quite calmly, though she was conscious that the other's light eyes were fixed with curious intentness on her face.

"He is generally in your train," observed the widow, with a light sneer, "quite a cavalier servant!"

"Quite," agreed Miss Marston, with superb calmness, though she was really much annoyed at her companion's manner.

"There will be quite a gathering of the Corinthians here," observed Mrs. Clifton. "Your former friend, Captain Turner, is here already."

"Captain Turner was never a friend of mine," said the beauty haughtily. "Only an acquaintance."

"I see. In such a case a distinction without a difference."

"That is not my opinion."

"Then you have brought Captain Clutterby?" spitefully.

"Exactly. We have brought Dick," acquiesced Mary, languidly, knowing that an affection of indifference to her pointed barbs annoyed the wily widow more than anything else.

"And this evening there will be another arrival from Hounslow."

"Indeed!"

"Yes," and the light blue eyes fixed themselves with a malicious look on Mary's face.

"Are you not curious to know who it is?"

"Not the least in the world."

"You won't be indifferent when you hear it is Major Mavis."

For an instant a scarlet flush swept up over Miss Marston's fair face, and the red lips trembled; the next she recovered herself and said coolly:

"Major Mavis is certainly a great acquisition to a house party; he is so entertaining, dances well, and is always kind enough to ask me often;" and with this parting shaft at the woman whom she guessed instinctively loved the man who had given his whole heart to her, she turned her shoulder to the widow and began an animated conversation with Maggie, and Dick, who had come in, and of course was standing near her; for though, now he knew his chance of winning her was hopeless, still she held an irresistible attraction for him, and until she became another man's wife he would never be able to keep away from her. She was his lodestone, the magnet that drew him, resist as he would.

And what wonder he was fascinated?

She had thrown off the fur mantle, and her beautiful head was leaning against the dark sables, that threw up, cameo fashion, the delicate, patrician features and superb eyes. From time to time, as she chatted with her young friend, these eyes wandered round the old room, but otherwise she gave no sign of the admiration she felt for its quaintness and the many curios dispersed about.

"Time to dress," smiled Maggie, as the sound of a gong rang through the house, and she rose reluctantly to go upstairs, for it was very pleasant to her to be near Dick Clutterby, to hear his pleasant voice, and meet the kindly glance of his eyes. Still she had to, and she went with Mary, who seemed a little thoughtful and preoccupied, and hardly took much notice of the bedroom allotted to her and her mother, which was old, and splendid with the splendour of good Queen Bess's time.

"If only you had a place like this, Moll!" sighed Mrs. Marston, as she began to remove her travelling dress, "how happy we should be!"

"I don't know that I should!"

"Oh, yes you would. You're well fitted to play the part of a woman of fashion."

"It's no fault of yours if I'm not, mother!" she retorted, bitterly.

"I've tried to bring you up in the way in which you should go," said the elder lady with smug complacency, "and I do hope and trust you'll make the most of your time here. There are one or two men here worth your notice, and I hear the great Russian merchant, Mr. Haviland, is expected shortly. He is fabulously wealthy."

"You have not lost much time making inquiries after possible sons-in-law!"

"No; I never let the grass grow under my feet. What are you going to wear to-night?" turning to a huge dress basket laden with finery.

"Black."

"That means the moiré, of course?"

"Yes."

"You will look well in that!"

And she did. It fitted her like a glove, and the brilliant jet embroideries enhanced the dazzling whiteness of her neck and arms.

The only ornament she wore was a heart composed entirely of diamonds—an heirloom from her father's family, which was suspended round her neck by a broad, black ribbon.

Her entrance was a signal for most of the men in the drawing-room to leave the fair ones they were chatting with, and cluster round her.

The Rev. Horatio had the happiness of taking her into dinner, and it was a happiness to him, for he thought her a "a dosid fine woman," and supposed she was wealthy.

He might have been less attentive had he known the true state of the Marstons' monetary affairs, and that even the gown on her back was not paid for.

However, he did not know it, and he kept up an animated conversation, to Mrs. Clifton's indignation, who, having on one side the hobbledehoy, and on the other Captain Turner, found it impossible to keep the ball of conversation rolling, and yawned more than once, before dessert was put on the table.

There was a vacant chair by Mary, and once or twice she wondered vaguely who it was for.

Her wonder was answered just as the finger-glasses appeared, for with them came in a tall dark man, with a distinguished air, and an aristocratic, if slightly *blase*, face.

It was Mark Mavis, and as he smiled in recognition of the greetings of his host and hostess, he slipped into the vacant chair by Miss Marston, and gave her hand a warm and lingering pressure under the friendly screen of the table.

"Are you surprised to see me?" he asked, in low tones.

"No," she replied, a lovely blush tinging

the pure pallor of her cheeks, "I heard you were coming here this afternoon."

"And when did you arrive?" with an admiring glance at the beautiful face he had learnt, to his cost, to love so passionately.

"To-day at five."

"And Dick, too, of course?" with a smile that had not the faintest tinge of jealousy in it, for he was not afraid of poor Dick as a rival.

"And Dick, too, of course," she echoed, with an amusing smile that made her quite radiant. "Happy man, I envy him!"

"Why?"

"Because he sees so much more of you than I do. Do you know this last month has seemed like a year to me, banished from your presence. Tell me, are you glad to see me now?"

For all answer she gave him one swift look from the superb grey eyes, and that satisfied him.

"It has been hard," he went on in his low, well-bred tones, that reached only her ear, "to keep away, to know you were in Bayswater, and not to dare to come and see you!"

"I thought it was for the best," she murmured.

"For the best, when——"

But just at that moment Mrs. Renshaw gave the signal, and all the ladies rose, and filed out of the room.

In the drawing-room Mrs. Marston made one or two attempts to get near her daughter, and give her a hint to be cooler in her manner to Major Mavis, but Mary kept close to Maggie's side, and did not give her mother a chance.

After the gentlemen joined them, she was, of course, safe, for someone suggested dancing, and the young people all trooped down to the great entrance hall, which was just the place for a valse, with its polished oaken boards, and its decoration of spears and flags, and warlike weapons.

"I mean to have the three next," whispered Mark, masterfully, as he drew Mary's hand through his arm. "The three last have been duty dances."

"What! when two of your partners were Miss Renshaw and Mrs. Clifton?"

"Yes. Our young hostess is heavy, and Mrs. Clifton is so spiteful that did she dance ten times better than she does, I would prefer dispensing with the honour!"

"That means that she has been talking against me," smiled Miss Marston.

"Perhaps she has. But—let us begin," and putting his arm round her waist they whirled away over the slippery boards, followed by many admiring glances, for she was the loveliest woman present, and he the handsomest man.

"Let us take a turn through here," he suggested, when the valse was over, pushing aside the heavy curtains that concealed the door leading to the picture gallery.

"It will be dark," she objected.

"Save for the moonlight. You will not be afraid with me? I never heard of a ghost in the Renshaw family."

"Oh, no, I am not afraid," and she yielded to the pressure of his arm and went with him into the great, vast, dark room, lighted here and there by the moonlight that streamed through the unshuttered windows, and made chequered patches like a chessboard on the dark floor.

"How cold it looks outside," she said, with a little shudder, as they stopped in the deep embrasure of a window, and stood arm-in-arm looking out at the snow-covered earth.

"Are you cold?" he asked tenderly, drawing her arm further through his, and pressing it against his heart that beat heavily, with a fever of love and adoration for the beautiful creature near him.

"No. Only it looks so desolate, like a great grave with one huge pall over it."

"Morbid idea, Mary. What have you been doing, or who have you been with to get such notions from?"

"No one new," she replied carelessly, "and

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as to my life, it has been much the same during the last month as always. The same treadmill round of gaieties."

"The same without me?" he exclaimed, reproachfully.

"No—I don't quite mean that," she returned hesitatingly.

"I hope not," he put in eagerly. "I would fain believe you had missed me a little."

"Of course I have," she responded lightly, feeling they were treading on dangerous ground. "Are you not the best dancer I know? Naturally I missed you at dances. But you know what I mean by saying life was the same. Our world seems made up of dressing, and flirting, and dinners, and dances, and entertainments of all kinds. A dreary round after all."

"Yes; I suppose it is," agreed her companion a little moodily, "if we analyse it. But it does not do to look too closely under the surface of life."

"Sometimes we can't help seeing its follies and emptiness," she returned bitterly. "The axis on which it revolves, the object for which every one seems to live, is money, money, money!"

"Not everyone, Mary. But what has come to you?" scanning the beautiful face that looked so cold and proud in the moonlight, eagerly. "You seem different from what you were."

"I suppose I am tired of all the shams and tricks of society," she replied, with a little joyless laugh.

"Then shall we agree to leave it?" he asked, quickly, pressing her hand closer against his heart. "Dearest, will you not retract that cruel sentence of banishment? Let us marry, and live in a little cottage in the country, 'The world forgetting, by the world forgot.'"

"Delightful in theory," she sighed, "but what are we to have for to eat, eat, eat? We are both so poor, Mark."

"But we shall be rich in love, Mary," passing his arm round her waist, and drawing her to his breast. "Tell me again, as you did at the moonlight fête last summer, that I am the only man you ever have or ever will love."

"I shall never love anyone else," she murmured softly, the glamour of the hour and place, and his presence making her forget all worldly and prudent considerations for a few delicious minutes.

"My own darling!" he cried, joyfully pressing a kiss on the fair cheek. "I must make you promise, now that you are in a kindly mood, to be merciful to me, to promise to be my wife."

"Not now, not now," she returned, hurriedly, as though not able to trust herself to his pleadings. "We must go back, Mark; we shall be missed."

"Don't be cruel, Mary. Give me a few moments more; they are so precious—so expressively precious—to me."

"We shall meet often here," she returned, in unsteady tones.

"Yes, but not alone. Do stay."

"I must not," she replied, more firmly, withdrawing from his arms as the memory of her mother's words, "We are on the brink of ruin," occurred to her. "Come," laying her hand on his arm, with a brilliant smile, "they must be playing our third valse now." And reluctantly he yielded, and went back to the hall with her.

"And when is Mr. Haviland coming?" Mrs. Clifton was saying to Miss Renshaw, as they passed her, and she favoured them with a long stare.

"On Friday next," answered Maggie.

"We shall all have to look our best then," observed the widow, with a little malignant grin. "What a commotion his arrival will cause amongst mammas with marriageable daughters, and amongst portionless damsels themselves."

And Mary knew that her mother would be more flattered than anyone else, and felt that the time of lovers was, indeed, brief in her case.

## CHAPTER III.

"O, faithless love, with lips foreworn,  
And laughing eyes that looked a lie,  
One face forsaken and forlorn  
Will surely haunt you 'till you die—  
One spectre in your brightest hours  
Lurk 'mid the music and the flowers."

There are not many things more calculated to excite than following the hounds, and the meet at the covert side is a pleasant and exhilarating prelude. The bright scarlet of the huntsman's coat; the bay of the hounds, so dear to the heart of keen sportsmen; the ringing voices of the "whips," as they keep order amongst the dogs; the ladies on horseback, and the carriages and phætonns, all form a scene both pleasant and cheerful.

Mary, mounted on Mr. Renshaw's favourite hunter, Fire King, a splendid bay, was looking remarkably well in a tight-fitting green habit that showed off her pretty figure to advantage; and the veil, that just stopped short of the crimson lips, was ver' becoming.

As usual, she was the cynosure of all eyes, and, as usual, she was surrounded by a crowd of men, each vieing with the other in striving to gain her attention; and Mark Mavis set his teeth hard more than once, as he noted how animatedly she appeared to listen to the conversation of her many admirers.

"Who is the girl in the green habit?" asked a middle-aged, heavy-looking man, who, attired in the orthodox scarlet, astride a magnificent grey—a thoroughbred, from his clean, well-shaven head to his delicate legs, yet looked anything but sportsmanlike—of his companion.

"That is Miss Marston," replied the master of the hounds, Lord Falcon.

"An uncommonly handsome young woman."

"Yes. She hasn't a bad point, has she?" remarked the Earl, as he scanned her critically. "Her figure is as good as her face, and she knows how to ride too. Plenty of nerve, and a good seat."

"The lady seems to be a *rara avis*," remarked his companion, with a slight sneer.

"There are not many like her, or to compare with her," rejoined the Master, who was a staunch admirer of Mary's.

"How is it, then, the lady is not married?" "No money. She lacks what you possess, Haviland, so you'd better go in and win, as you're on the look-out for a wife."

"Not bad advice. I like her *tournure* and air of distinction; but she's a coquette, I'll wager, for she manages to keep the ball of conversation rolling, though there are at least twenty fellows round her."

"You could not expect to find so beautiful a woman quite free from vanity."

"No, I suppose not; and, at any rate, she'd do a man credit at the head of his table."

"That she would! And I'll tell you what, Haviland," laughed the old peer, dropping his voice, "if I were a bachelor myself I'd go in and try to win."

"What you approve of, my lord, ought to suit Benjamin Haviland," smiled the rich merchant, significantly.

"That means Falcon Royal will not be honoured by your presence any longer for the present," observed the Earl, with an answering smile.

"You are right. I shall accept Renshaw's invitation, often pressingly given, and ride there this afternoon. I will, with your permission, tell one of my grooms to ride back to the Royal, and send my things over to Ravensden Grange."

"Do so by all means. That looks as though he meant business this time," murmured Lord Falcon, as his friend wheeled his horse round, and went in search of his groom; but just at this moment, the dogs giving tongue, showed they had drawn the fox from Pithill Wood; and, like a flash of lightning, away went dogs and huntsmen, and the one or two ladies who meant to be in at the death.

It was a rattling good spin. Reynard went straight for Eastern Beacon, and not a few

"Rammed down their hats, and got home in their seats."

The hounds were well in line, the pace fast, the scent lying well. On he went, through Downlands to Combe, where, being headed, he turned sharp to the right, over Creedon Ball on to Rentre. The hounds were now pressing hard on him, and, knowing his chance of life was waning, he made a desperate effort to save himself, but ineffectually. The hounds were fresher than poor Reynard, and he paid the penalty of his class and race.

Mary was in at the death, and received the brush, being the only lady then present, and declared herself quite ready for another spin. But the second fox was more wily than the first, took them miles and miles away, and finally ran to earth in Totmos Wood. Then she and Mark, and some half dozen others from the house-party at the Grange, turned their weary horses homeward, and went slowly through the gathering gloom o' the winter's afternoon.

Miss Marston would have enjoyed the long ride, despite the cold and the steely drops of rain that splashed and beat on her face, could she have had a *tille-a-tete* with Mark, but this was not possible. One or other of the young men present rode at her side when the lanes were wide enough to permit it, and constantly engaged her attention, while those on ahead would turn now and then to address a remark to her.

Altogether she was not sorry when they arrived at the Grange, and she found herself in the oak-room, lounging in an easy chair before the fire, with a cup of tea in her hand.

"Have you had a brisk run?" asked Maggie, standing by her guest, and ministering to her wants.

"Splendid. We killed the first time, and the second the fox gave us no end of sport, though we couldn't kill him."

"And who got the brush?"

"Miss Marston," said the rather vulgar man, who had been presented to Mary during the day, but whose name she had not caught.

"You are glad you went, then?" pursued Maggie.

"To win such a trophy," put in the stout man again.

"It is not the first by a great many," replied the beauty coldly—for she was annoyed at the persistent way in which the man had followed her about all day.

"I am sure of that; you ride so well. Egad! I never saw anything better than the way you took that ditch!"

"A great deal was due to Fire King," declared Mary freezingly.

"He is a fine animal."

"I suppose you are a very good judge of a horse, Mr. Haviland?" remarked Mrs. Clifton, in very distinct tones, and with a sweet smile, but looking at Mary, who, though surprised to discover who this persistent admirer was, managed to subdue all outward sign of it, to the widow's annoyance.

"Pretty well," he allowed.

"Of course you have a great many hunters? I hear you rode three different horses to day."

"Yes, I have a good many. I think it a bad plan to ride a horse too hard."

"So it is, but we can't all have a dozen in our stables."

"Do you ride?" he asked abruptly, eyeing the widow keenly.

"Yes—not often to hounds. I am not possessed of Miss Marston's nerves," with a little disparaging movement of the fat white hands.

"It is better to have iron nerves than no nerves at all, and scream at the sight of a mouse, or faint if a blackbeetle crawls over the carpet," exclaimed Mary contemptuously, as she gathered up her habit in one hand, and her whip and gloves in the other, and left the room, while the widow vowed in her heart

that she would have a dire revenge for that openly administered snub.

That night the host, prompted by his new guest, brought Benjamin Haviland up to Miss Marston, while Mark Mavis fell to Mrs. Clifton's lot; and that indignant and spiteful dame determined to make the most use of her time.

"Quite an addition to our party, isn't he?" she began with a nasty acid little smile.

"Eh! Who is an addition?" inquired Mark quickly, for he had been surreptitiously watching Mary, and noted the marked attention paid her by her vulgar companion.

"Mr. Benjamin Haviland."

"Which is the gentleman with the biblical name?" he asked lightly.

"Oh, don't you know him?" in tones of profound astonishment.

"I have not that pleasure."

"Mr. Haviland is that gentleman who has taken Miss Marston in."

"Oh, really," with a disparaging glance at the red-faced, middle-aged man.

"Not much to look at, is he?"

"I can't say I admire him. But then there is no necessity for me to worship his money-bags, and that is what most of the *penitent* girls do," with a spiteful glare in Mary's direction.

"Oh, indeed!" said the Major again, seeing his companion expected him to say something.

"He's enormously rich. I should be almost afraid to say how many thousands a year he has!"

"Then I wouldn't say it if I were you, Mrs. Clifton," smiled the limerick.

"I mean that I am afraid you wouldn't believe me if I mentioned the sum," she explained, giving him a searching glance.

"Isn't it very great?" he inquired, with a little misgiving, for he knew only too well what a worshipper of Mammon Mrs. Marston was.

"Enormous. I have been told sixty thousand a year, and from his style of living, etc., I should say it is quite that."

"A princely fortune!" murmured Mark.

"Yes, and his place, Listowel Abbey, is magnificent, while his stud is allowed to be one of the best in the South of England. Altogether, it is no wonder all the thirty girls are running after him, and trying to win him;" and again the light, cruel eye wandered down the table, and fastened on Mary's fair face; and that time a pair of dark ones followed them, and grew harder as they marked the pleasure and animation on the girl's face, for Ben Haviland was telling her about his horses, and she was always interested in that topic.

"I should think that will be a case," remarked the widow, with another sharp smile, as she encountered Major Mavis's eyes. "That is to say, if he doesn't find out what a dinty-hearted flirt the lady he seems to admire so much is, before he commits himself irrevocably, and offers her himself and his fortune."

"Let us hope that he will, if only for the lady's sake," retorted her companion, sarcastically, though the angry blood rose over his face, even to the roots of his dark hair.

"It would be a very good thing for her," observed Mrs. Clifton, nonchalantly, with utter disregard for the angry ring in his tone.

"I hardly think so. Miss Marston's looks should at least secure her a handsome husband, as well as a wealthy one. Her mating with the biblical gentleman would indeed be a case of beauty and the beast," and he cast a look of contempt and disgust at Mr. Haviland, who looked more like a waif than anything else, in evening dress.

"Beauty isn't everything, and beggars can't be choosers!"

"What do you mean?" asked Mark, coldly.

"I mean that the Marstons are on the brink of ruin, and that the beauty's worldly mamma knows quite well her only chance of retrieving their fallen fortunes is to marry the daughter

well, and get her bills paid by a wealthy son-in-law."

"They hardly give one the idea of impudentious people," said Mavis, hating the conversation, and loathing himself for listening to anything in disparagement of the woman he loved, and yet under the circumstances, being utterly unable to escape from the clutches of the wily woman who meant to do her best to part these two, who loved so dearly, and catch the soldier's heart in the rebound.

"Of course not. They've gone on the credit system, and owe a sum that is quite appalling. Those smart gowns they're decked in aren't paid for!"

"You seem to have an intimate acquaintance with their affairs!"

"Madame Modiste makes my gowns as well as theirs, and the poor creature often bewails herself bitterly to me, and regrets having trusted them so largely. However, that will be all altered now, and I doubt not Mr. Haviland will behave liberally towards them as to settlements, etc.," and then, having planted her darts, and set the ball a-rolling, the widow exerted herself to be agreeable and fascinating, and so far succeeded that before long Mark found himself laughing over her droll stories, and forgetting for the time his fears and misgivings.

That night Mrs. Clifton managed to chain Mark to her side when he first came to the drawing-room, and, by hook and by crook, kept him from a tête-à-tête with Mary, in which she was ably, but unconsciously, aided by Mr. Haviland, who hovered round the beauty like a huge, ungainly moth round a candle, much to her annoyance, for it was so marked that no one could mistake it.

An angry scene was the result, when mother and daughter were alone, for Mrs. Marston was injudicious enough to speak openly on the subject, and say that Mary was showing her good sense in accepting his attentions, on which she fired up, and declared she would not speak to the man again, that he was an odious wretch, and she meant to snub him on every possible occasion, and show him how little she valued him or his wealth.

#### CHAPTER IV.

"He will hold thee, when his passion shall have spent its novel force,

Something better than his dog, a little dearer than his horse."

MARY, however, found it rather difficult to carry out her threat in entirety. It is no use knocking one's head against a stone wall, and, metaphorically speaking, Mr. Haviland was a stone wall; or, at any rate, he was as hard, as blind, as dull of comprehension, apparently, as one when he chose.

He did choose not to see the snubs the beauty administered. He received them with placid indifference, and took no notice of her freezing manner. He had had a conversation with Mrs. Marston, and knew she approved of his suit, and that there would be no difficulty there.

They understood each other à merveille, and so he set himself down to win this lovely girl he coveted for his wife in much the same dogged, steady, determined fashion as he had to amass the colossal fortune he possessed, and with little or no fear of not ultimately winning.

He was always at her side, in season and out. In fact, he haunted her like a shadow, to her intense annoyance, and managed, by right-down doggedness, to keep other would-be lovers at a distance.

Mark Mavis grew very sore at heart as the days wore on. He never got a chance of saying a word alone to Mary. Mrs. Marston, Mrs. Clifton, and Mr. Haviland took good care of that; and the wily widow dropped many insinuations—told him many of those half lies that are so difficult to refute, and that made him think Mary wished him to keep his dis-

tance—and, in his anger and sorrow, he entered into a desperate flirtation with Mrs. Clifton, which hurt and annoyed the girl he loved terribly, for she was intensely proud, and made the barrier that had arisen between them harder to bridge.

Matters were in this state when they all went out a-hunting one fine February morning—some of the ladies on horseback, some in dog-carts, some in pony phaetons; and four dowagers, amongst whom was Mrs. Marston, in the barouche.

Now Mrs. Clifton, though a coward at heart in the hunting-field, had got herself up in the nastiest of habits, and the jauntiest of hats, and, mounted on a fairly quiet horse, was doing her best to keep Mark Mavis chained to her side.

She had not much difficulty in doing this. He was quiet and *distract*, and made no effort to escape from her clutches bodily, though his eyes followed the graceful figure in the green habit going on ahead wistfully.

"This is a fine horse Miss Marston is, isn't it?" remarked his companion at last.

"Yes," he agreed, turning his eyes from the rider to the horse, a splendid grey—own brother, apparently, to the one Mr. Haviland bestrode, and which he generally rode. "Is it a new purchase of our host's?"

"Oh, dear no! That is *handsome* Benjamin's steed!"

"Ah!" he exclaimed, his face growing dark, as he set his teeth, and tugged viciously at the curb, making his mettlesome bay rear angrily.

"Sent over to the Abbey for it, in order that his future wife may try its paces."

"His future wife!" he repeated, unaware how hollow and despairing his voice sounded. "Is it all settled then?"

"Preliminaries are. And before the summer is in full swing there'll be a fashionable marriage at St. George's."

"And beauty will mate with the beast," he muttered.

"And the beast will endow beauty with all his worldly goods and chattels, which are not to be sneered at; and, I think, after all, she will have the best of the bargain. Of course, it's nothing else but a bargain, for I believe she is as cold as a stone, and has just about as much heart," faltered out his friend.

"How kind you women are to one another!" sneered Mark; and, before the oily widow could give him a sweet answer, the view-huloo swelled on the air, and away dashed the Major's bay, leaving Mrs. Clifton's milder mettled steed far in the rear.

That day three of the field-rode desirately, Major Mavis, because he was mad with despair and jealousy, and would just as soon have broken his neck and ended his troubles as not; Mary, because she had a wild desire to distinguish herself, and by some wild freak draw his attention to herself; Captain Clutterby because he thought Miss Marston would come to grief, and thought he ought to be near to render assistance in case of an accident.

Mr. Haviland rode hard too, but with a certain amount of caution. He did not want to strain or maim his splendid favorite; and more than once he swore a good round oath as he saw Mary put his hunter at tremendous jumps, and rattle him across rough ground with the coolest indifference. However, there were no casualties, and they all jogged home in the twilight, in rather a grumpy and silent fashion.

Mary did not, as usual, go to the oak room for tea, but went straight upstairs to her room. Here she found her mother with dishevelled hair, red eyes, and a generally dilapidated appearance sobbing bitterly.

"What is the matter, mother?" she asked, going over and standing beside her.

"Oh, Mary, Mary, the blow has fallen sooner than I thought it would!"

"What blow?"

"Madame Modiste."

"Well?"

"She is going to make me a bankrupt!"

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"Mother!" horror, and incredulity mingled in the girl's tone.

"She is?"

"She must not. We must prevent her doing so."

"We can't."

"Why not?"

"We owe her too much."

"How much?"

"Nearly twelve hundred pounds!"

"Mother, how could you run up such a bill?"

"I did it for your sake, Mary!" she sobbed, "to get you well settled. And now help me out of this difficulty, my dear, dear child, or I shall die of shame," and falling on her knees before her daughter, she raved and moaned, and tore her grey hair, and besought her, and shocked and horrified beyond measure the girl gave the promise that was to blight her whole life.

The result of this *fiasco* was that Mrs. Marston had to go to bed, utterly prostrated; and Mary, feeling utterly dazed and bewildered, hurriedly dressed herself and went down. Dick took her in, and his cheerful conversation did much to restore her to her usual frame of mind. After awhile she noticed that Major Mavis was not at the table.

"Where is your *Fidus Achates*?" she asked.

"Eh? Which do you mean?" with a smiling glance in Maggie's direction, for of late they had been going to the village together to see the gaffers and gamblers.

"Major Mavis, of course."

"Oh, don't you know?"

"No, what?"

"He went away an hour ago."

"Went away!" she repeated blankly.

"Yes. Some business, I believe. Didn't you see him before he went?"

"No," and in spite of her efforts her voice trembled. To think that he should leave the Grange without one word of farewell to her nor even a hand-clap! It wounded her proud heart cruelly; and she commanded chattering feverishly to Dick on indifferent subjects, while an angry red spot burnt on either cheek; and he, for the first time in his life, began to wonder whether his beautiful cousin cared more for Mark Mavis than was well for her own happiness, or her mother's matrimonial projects, for being in love with her himself, and of a particularly easy-going indifferent temperament, he had never suspected his friend Mark of being a victim to the same hopeless passion that threatened to wreck his own life.

That night Mary was destined to receive fresh humiliations, for Mrs. Clifton, with her liveliest, nastiest smile, seated herself beside her, and began talking of the Major, and his sudden departure, and insinuated that she had known he was going for some days, and that there was more between them than could be conveniently published to the world at present; and the girl listened with keen and bitter anguish to the wily woman's lies, and had to exert all her powers to keep back the sobs that rose to her lips.

As one in a dream, she got up and strayed into the conservatory, where, thanks to hot-water pipes, and other appliances, the temperature was that of the sunny south, and the yellow-flowered cacti blossomed, and orchids displayed their delicate flowers, and red and white camellias grew side by side, and tropical plants reared their green heads, and palms and ferns made it a pleasant retreat.

Thither she was quickly followed by Mr. Haviland, who having been summoned to the Abbey by his land-steward on important business, and knowing he must leave the Grange in two or three days, had determined to put his fate in the touch, and win or lose this woman whom he admired so much, and coveted for his wife.

"Are you fond of flowers?" he asked, by way of a prelude, as he passed along at her side, through the dim, green aisles.

"Yes, very," she replied, dreamily.

"But, living in London, I suppose you can hardly indulge your taste much?"

"No. We have a small conservatory, but it contains nothing rare, nor very beautiful."

"Ah, well! I shall hope some day to show you my flowers at the Abbey!"

"I have heard you have acres of glass there," she rejoined, with a faint smile, trying to shake off the lethargy that oppressed her, and show a polite interest in his conversation.

"Yes, I have a good many houses. My gardener prides himself on his exhibits, and I let him have his way, and do pretty well as likes."

"You are a lenient master!" she observed, absently, toying with a rose-red camellia.

"I am so much away, you see, that my people have their own way in almost everything!"

"That just suits them I should think."

"Yes, but it doesn't suit me. In fact, Miss Marston, I want to change my style of life," looking keenly at her pale face, "I want to be more in my own house—in fact, to have a home. Now to have that, I must have a wife!"

At that word the girl started, and seemed to awake from a dream—to the unpalatable fact that this fat, red-faced man was going to propose to her.

But she made no attempt to fly and escape the ordeal. In fact, she was too weary and heart-sick to care what happened, and stood there like a fair statue, toying with the crimson flower, and listening to the words that fell from Benjamin Haviland's lips.

"May I speak of something that concerns me very narrowly, Miss Marston?"

"Yes, Mr. Haviland," she assented, mechanically.

"Well, I am going to put a plain question to you, and I want a plain answer. I'm not a hot-headed boy to go in for loves-raptures or any folly of that sort, and tell you I'm dying for your smile or a kind word; but I like you better than any other woman I have ever known, and I admire you immensely; so will you be my wife?"

"I will be as candid as you are," she replied, with a little cold smile, recovering herself now that the supreme moment had come, and tell you that I have no love to give you, such as a woman should feel for her husband, and that I am generally thought to be hard and heartless!"

"Hearts are out of date," he rejoined, with a sneer, "and as for love, I don't believe in it. Infatuation on one side, folly on the other—a sort of feeling sure to die out between husband and wife. So will you have me?"

"Yes, I will marry you," she answered recklessly, caring little what became of her since she could not be Mark's wife.

"That's right. Let me put this on till I get you a better one," drawing a ring from his little finger, that was all too large for her dainty digit, and made her shudder as she felt its contact, and realised that it was the forerunner of that other circlet that would bind her for life to a man she loathed and detested.

"I suppose you won't go on with the non-sense most young women think it right to affect on these occasions," he continued, "and object to a speedy wedding?"

"When you like!" she replied, with almost insulting indifference.

Since she had to be sacrificed, what did a week or a month either way matter?

"I will speak to your mother to-morrow, and now let us go back to our friends;" and drawing her hand through his arm he led her back in triumph to the drawing-room, and his air of possession, and the calmness with which she accepted his attentions, coupled with the fact that a splendid diamond blazed on the third finger of the left hand, led everyone to conclude they were engaged.

"Is it true, Mary?" asked Dick the next morning, as they stood alone together for a few moments by the blazing log fire, waiting for the horses to come round.

"Is it true?" she replied, avoiding his gaze.

"That you are going to marry Mr. Haviland?"

"Yes, Dick; it is true," she answered, slowly and heavily.

"Good heavens!" he exclaimed, in dismay. "I did not—I could not—believe it, and now I hear it verified from your own lips. You mean to sell yourself, Mary?"

"Yes; I am obliged to do so."

"Obliged! In this a free country? You jest, surely?"

"No. We are on the brink of ruin, and I have promised mother to marry this *Croesus* in order that she and I may have plenty to eat and drink, fine clothes to wear, and a house over our heads for the rest of our lives."

"Is it as bad as that with your monetary affairs?" he exclaimed, quickly.

"Matters could not be worse. Ruin, actual ruin, is staring us in the face!"

"Can't I help you, Mary?" he asked, earnestly. "You know every penny I possess is at your disposal."

"Thank you, dear Dick," she replied, gently. "But you cannot help us. We owe Madame Modiste alone more than a year's income, and there are others clamouring for their money. It would take about three thousand pounds to satisfy them, mother tells me, and then we have to live. So you see there is nothing for me but to marry *Croesus*!"

"This is terrible," he groaned, "for I fear you neither love nor respect this man."

"No, I do not," she replied, drearily. "He is not the kind of man to win a woman's respect, much less her love. Still, were ten times worse I should marry him. There is no other course possible. I am not cut out for a lady's maid or a shop-girl," she added, with a dreary laugh.

"You can become my wife," he whispered, eagerly, his blue eyes alight with light and hope. "I am not rich, but I can give you ordinary comforts, and a great love."

"Thank you, Dick, for your noble offer," she replied, in husky tones, "but only a man with great wealth can help my mother and me. There are these wretched debts, and then mother must be provided for. With her tastes and habits she could not possibly do with less than four hundred a year, and I am naturally extravagant. We should pull you down into the same slough of despond into which we have sunk and stuck fast."

"I will risk all that," he rejoined, quickly. "Anything to save you from the awful fate of becoming that man's wife."

"Too late!" she sighed. "I have pledged my word, and already mother has written to Modiste, telling her everything will be settled to her satisfaction shortly. I have burnt my bridge of boats. I cannot go back."

"You can if you wish. You are not his property yet. Oh, Mary, let me beseech you—"

But at that moment Mr. Haviland, habited in scarlet, made his appearance, and effectually put an end to the conversation between the cousins by carrying Miss Marston off, and helping her to mount the grey.

"To think of her wedding such a fellow as that!" groaned Dick, looking after them with wistful eyes. "Why, he'll think more of his horses and dogs six months after they are married than he will of her!"

## CHAPTER V.

"Never had earth so fair a summer,

Never the red rose bloomed so bright;

Warm winds wafted her fragrance from her,

Clear skies flooded the land with light.

Dead delight is a living sadness;

Heart of mine we have found it so,

Sick and sorry for love's brief madness,

Long ago—so long ago!"

If wealth, adulation, travelling abroad, being possessed of fine diamonds and fine

clothes, overwhelmed with flattery, and courted by the high and mighty of the land, could make a woman happy. Mrs. Haviland ought to have been happy. And yet there were those among her intimates who declared she was not quite happy, that there was a crumple in the rose-leaf that chased her sorely; and, though she was always brilliant and witty in society, there were times, in the seclusion of her own room, when she showed signs of melancholy and *envy*.

During the four years of her married life, Mary had plumbed the dark depths of despair and humiliation in *private*. In public she bore herself well and proudly, with an insolent *hauteur* that became her well, and did the honours of her husband's house gracefully, letting no one see the reverse of the medal if she could help it.

They had spent nearly the whole of the four years abroad—a great portion in Rome, for Mr. Haviland liked it; and Mary loved to wander over the Campagna's far-reaching plain, and her eyes would travel over the long range of ruined aqueducts, and tumbled-down buildings, to where it was bounded by the blue and silver line of the Sabine Hills, over the cottages of vinedresser or herdsman, over tomb and walls of dateless ruin, over the medieval towers, and the peaceful herds of sheep and oxen. However, at last, they had to leave the sunny plains of Italy, and return to England.

It was May when they arrived, a sweet, soft May, with blue skies and wooing breezes, and steady, genial sunshine, that was ripening fruit and flowers apace. London was crowded, and they were hardly settled in Belgrave-square when a host of friends and acquaintances hastened to visit them, and invitations for divers entertainments poured in.

These Mr. Haviland commanded Mary to accept, for he meant to parade his beautiful wife before the *élite* of London society, wearing the famous suite of diamonds he had given her on their marriage, and attired in some of Worth's and Pingat's masterpieces.

He wanted her to be admired. He took it as a compliment to his own good taste and judgment; and yet he was wildly jealous of her at times, and his violence and overbearing demeanour startled, if it did not actually alarm, her at first.

After a time she got used to it; and, as she learned to know her contemptible husband better, she treated all his anger and reproaches with cold scorn, that enraged him beyond measure.

She had never professed to love or respect him; and as her mother had four hundred a-year secured to her for life, and was able to keep up the Bayswater villa, she was too reckless to care what became of herself, and defied him when he bullied, and froze him when he offered caresses, and treated him always with a superb contempt that galled the man of wealth terribly, and made him sometimes half repent his marriage.

It certainly had proved a mistake for both of them, and their natures had deteriorated. Mary was reckless and careless, and sought, in a round of pleasure and ceaseless gaiety, distraction from unpleasant thoughts and vain regrets.

These regrets became positive torture on the night after their return to England. They were at the opera, and, while she was chatting carelessly with two or three admirers who had come to their box, her eyes fell on two familiar faces in the stalls. One was Dick Clutterby's, and the other Mark Mavis!

A thrill ran through her as she encountered the latter's eyes fixed intently on her face; and, in spite of her composure and habitual calmness, a flush spread up to her brow, and a look almost of terror clouded the great grey eyes as she bowed to them.

A few minutes later Dick rose and made his way to the box, but Mavis remained in the stalls, and divided his attention between the stage and Mrs. Haviland.

"Mary, are you quite happy?" whispered

her cousin, when everyone else was listening intently to Patti singing "Home, Sweet Home."

"Oh, yes!" she replied, with a languid smile. "Happy as the world counts happiness."

"And not as you would wish to be," he observed, quickly.

"I did not say so," she replied, a trifle haughtily. "Mr. Haviland is extremely liberal. I have an unlimited sum to spend on dress, countless suites of diamonds and other jewels, a town house, a country abbey, more carriages than I know what to do with, and a regiment of servants to fly to do my bidding. What more could any woman want?"

"Nothing, of course," he assented, coldly. But as he wended his way back to Hounslow that night the young man knew that the old Mary Marston was dead, and that the new one was a very inferior article.

The next night, at Lady Silvermouth's ball, one of the first people Mrs. Haviland saw as she entered the room, leaning on her husband's arm, was Major Mavis. In spite of herself her eyes brightened involuntarily as they rested on his dark, handsome face; and he came forward at once, with his usual cool, nonchalant manner, to ask her for a dance—a request to which she at once acceded, and made no objection; while as to the charming Benjamin, he was busy talking politics to his host, the Earl of Silvermouth, and had eyes for nothing and nobody.

"Shall we take a turn outside?" suggested Mark, after they had spun round the room two or three times; "it is so hot in here."

"If you like," she assented. And together they strolled out into the lovely grounds surrounding Silvermouth House, and paced slowly down a side path dimly lighted by tiny-coloured lamps.

"It is a long time since we met," he remarked, looking down at the beautiful face, that looked so white in the starry gloom.

"Yes," she agreed, with a sigh; "and so much has happened since."

"True. For instance, you are married."

"And you, Major Mavis! Are you not married also?"

"I? No; certainly not!" he rejoined, quickly, something very like amazement in his tone. "I am a bachelor still, and likely to remain one now."

"But—but—what—about Mrs. Clifton?" she faltered.

"Mrs. Clifton! What of her?"

"I understood, when we were all staying together at the Benthaws, that you were engaged to her."

"Who told you that lie?" he asked, sternly.

"Was it a lie, Mark?" she queried, joyfully, the old familiar name slipping out of her agitation.

"An unmitigated one!" he declared, decisively. "Who told it you, Mary?"

"Mrs. Clifton."

"Confound the woman!" he exclaimed, wrathfully. "I see it all. It was part of the plan to separate us."

"A plan to separate us!" she repeated, confusedly.

"Yes, Mary. Don't you see?" he went on, pressing her arm against his heart, as though to check its wild throbbing. "They knew we loved each other dearly, and thought it might win the day against money; and so, to make things sure, your mother and Mrs. Clifton told lies to each of us, and managed to part us."

"Oh, Mark!" she cried, in anguish, looking at him with those eyes he loved so well, "and we might have been so happy together!"

"And may be still," he cried, madly, taking her in his arms and kissing her. "He is nothing to you, that dummy—that money-grubber whom you have married. Leave him. Let us go away together and be happy!"

"Mark, you must never speak like that again to me," she said, gently freeing herself

from his embrace. "I must not, dare not, listen to you."

And that night he said no more to her, but in his heart he swore he'd win her to be his own, despite all obstacles. And as the summer days wore on he laid steady siege to the heart that was already his.

Wherever Mrs. Haviland appeared there was Mark Mavis, at her side whenever he could be, openly and pointedly devoted. And at last it began to dawn upon Benjamin that the linesman was something more than an ordinary acquaintance of his wife's; and in his coarse way he questioned her, and ordered her not to be seen with him flirting and dancing with him in public.

"Would you prefer me to do it in private?" she asked, with languid insolence.

"I should prefer you not to receive his attentions at all. And, hark ye, madame, if you don't obey me, and give this fellow his *congé*, I'll make you do it!"

"Pooh!" she laughed, contemptuously. "I shall dance with him and speak to him as often as I please."

"You jade! I'll lock you up," and seizing her arm in an iron grip, he shook her till she nearly became insensible, when, pushing her roughly on to a chair, he turned and left the room.

She remained where her brutal husband flung her for nearly an hour. Then, rising, white and still trembling, she went up to her room, and making a careful toilet, drove down to Chiswick, where Mrs. Derwent was giving a garden party to a select few, and where she was to meet Mark.

"How pale you look! What is the matter?" he asked, as they strolled off, Dick Clutterby sending an anxious and uneasy look after them; for already busy tongues were coupling their names together, and he feared the worst, knowing his cousin's temperament, and that of the hound to whom she was bound.

"I haven't recovered from my shaking yet!" she replied, with a little bitter smile.

"Your shaking! What do you mean?" he replied, eagerly.

"Look!" And turning back her sleeve she showed a terrible bruise on the soft, white flesh.

"Who did that?"

"My husband."

"The brute! How can you stay with him, Mary? He will murder you one day in a fit of jealousy!"

"I wish he would," she answered, drearily. "I am tired of life, and ready to die!"

"Now. You would not be if you were with me in the sunny South. Oh, Mary, if you really loved me, you would not condemn me to this darkness of despair. Have you no pity for my misery—my desolation?"

"Mark! Mark! don't!" she implored.

But he was deaf to her pleadings, and there in that garden, sweet with midsummer roses, bright with midsummer sunshine, he urged her to fly with him, telling her what a heaven on earth he would make for her in some sunny Italian nook, urging her by every sophistry of which he was master to forget honour and duty, and yield the victory to love alone, and love won.

The unhappy woman gave way to his passionate prayers, and promised to fly with him that night—gave way before the pleas from those dearly-loved lips; and the struggle being over, gave herself up to the wild delight of showing her mad love for him.

After arranging the details of the flight, they parted, she driving up to town in her carriage, he going with all speed to Hounslow.

When she arrived at Belgrave-square she was surprised to see Dick Clutterby waiting for her.

"Why, Dick! what brings you here?" she exclaimed with a feverish affectation of gaiety.

"I thought you were at Mrs. Derwent's?"

"I was, but left early, and came on to see you."

"What about?" she asked, fearfully, for

something in his tone and manner alarmed her.

"About the fearful position in which you stand, and the terrible act you contemplate!" he answered, quietly.

"Dick!" cried the wretched woman, throwing out her arms with a gesture of despair.

"Have you thought of the sin?" he went on, "of the shame and disgrace you will entail on your family? If not, think of it, Mary, and hesitate before you sacrifice yourself and your honour!" And drawing her down by his side gently and kindly, even as a brother might, he showed her the folly and error of her ways; and she, sobbing and moaning, wrote the letter he besought her to, which told Mavis she had repented of her determination to go with him.

Dick took this letter and departed for Hounslow with it, wishing to deliver it before Mark started for town.

He found him busy thrusting some things into a portmanteau, and gave him the letter, saying simply: "My cousin asked me to give you that," and left the room.

Mark tore it open, and read it with a variety of emotions struggling for mastery in his breast. He was not a bad man, and he was half glad that the woman he adored should escape the terrible fate into which his mad passion would have plunged her—the misery, the degradation, the shame!

On the other hand, he loved her dearly, and loathed the thought of leaving her in the power of the cold, brutal man to whom she was bound, and who, according to the laws of his country, might knock her about, and abuse her just as much as ever he pleased, because she was his wife!

But what was his joy and thankfulness, on taking up the paper next morning, to see the account of Mr. Haviland's death the day before.

He had been seen riding down Harrow Hill at a tremendous pace, when the horse stumbled, and threw him clean over his neck, and the unfortunate merchant alighting on his head, broke his neck, and never stirred or spoke again.

From what a terrible needless sin had he and Mary been saved—saved by Dick Clunty—honest, good-hearted Dick—from that Midsummer madness!

\* \* \* \* \*

Eighteen months later there was a dual wedding at the tiny Tudor church on the Renshaw estate. The officiating clergyman was the Reverend Horatio Stephens. The brides were Mary and Maggie, and the bridegrooms Mark and Dick.

The latter, seeing it was useless to enter the lists for his cousin's hand, Major Mavis distancing all competitors, took pity on little, blue-eyed Maggie, who was fretting herself to death for love of him, and asked her to become his wife, and be content with a mild, and somewhat milk-and-water affection, which she accepted eagerly; and he never gave her cause to regret it, being only second in devotion to Mark, who remained his wife's lover to the last day of his life!

[THE END.]

A RASH VOW.—Queen Isabella, daughter of Philip II., who flourished in the twelfth century, vowed not to exchange her linen till the City of Ostend had been taken by her soldiers. The difficulties that sometimes interfere with military enterprises evidently did not occur to the lady at the time she made her vow, but unfortunately the siege lasted three years, and as singularly truthful was her majesty's character that she kept her oath to the last. To testify their regard to her persistency the ladies of the court adopted a dingy yellow colour for their ruffs and stockings, which they christened "T'isbeau." This was the origin of the tint known as écoru.

### THE TRUE TEST.

"Yes, I repeat it—the man I marry must be young, handsome, of good family, and wealthy."

Lilly Seemore—the young heiress, wheeled round on the music stool, shook back her long golden curls, and looked up archly into the dark handsome face of Clide Elings, the rich young broker, whom Madam Gossip said, would surely win the fair young heiress.

"But, Miss Seemore, if you really loved a man, and he happened to be poor, would your answer be the same?" he asked, looking down into the lovely blue eyes that were uplifted to his face, sparkling with mischief.

Something in the glance of his dark eyes, as he bent them upon her, caused the blue eyes to droop beneath his gaze, and the crimson tide to dye the fair cheeks, making her appear more beautiful.

"Yes, the very same," she replied with a saucy toss of her head. "The one that I will honour with my hand must be a perfect Adonis, I can assure you."

"Miss Desota, what is your opinion on the subject?" said Clide, turning to Lilly's music teacher.

Mabel Desota was a tall, beautiful brunette, with large, dreamy brown eyes, wavy chestnut hair, features as perfect in their beauty as though chiseled from a piece of white marble, and laughing rosebud lips that made one think of ripe cherries.

"If you please," she answered, with a rare, sweet smile, "I would rather not express my opinion."

Mr. Elings may excuse you, but I won't; so come, let us hear your ideas on the subject," exclaimed Lilly, as she caught the little hand which rested on the piano, and held it tightly between her own delicate white ones.

"Well, since you insist upon it, I will say that I think if two persons really and truly love each other, they should not let gold divide them."

"Spoken like a true woman," cried Clide Elings, as he stepped forward, and, catching her hand, raised it gallantly to his lips.

He glanced at her as he released her hand, and he saw the colour deepen in her cheeks, the eye droop, and the crimson lips part with a sweet smile, revealing the white teeth.

Lilly Seemore only smiled. Releasing her clasp on the music teacher's hand, she began to play a lively air.

"Your lesson is over, Miss Seemore," said Mabel Desota, drawing on her gloves.

Clide Elings took up his hat, and bowing low to Lilly, he bade her good morning, and left her presence in company with her music teacher.

Clide parted with Mabel at the door of her boarding-house, having obtained her permission to call on her some evening.

On the way to his office his thoughts were filled with Lilly Seemore—the fair young heiress, and Mabel Desota, the music teacher. But when he entered, the fair sweet face of Lilly had entirely faded from his mind, and in its place rose up the dark, bewildering beauty of Mabel Desota.

His agent—a dried-up, weazened faced old lawyer, to whom Clide entrusted the management of his investments, was waiting when he entered.

"Well, Musting," he said, as he threw himself into an easy chair, after shaking hands with the little old man, "what's the news?"

The old lawyer drew out his red silk handkerchief, wiped his face several times, folded it, and replaced it carefully in his hat. After a slight cough or two to clear his throat, he began to speak.

"My young friend, I have bad news to tell you."

"Bad news! Speak, Musting, and tell me what it is!"

"The Landal Bank is suspended, and every shilling deposited therein is lost."

"The Landal Bank suspended! Great Heaven, Musting, I am ruined!" exclaimed Clide, springing from his seat, and beginning to pace the narrow limits of the office with frantic strides.

"Sit down, Clide," said the lawyer, "and let me tell you. It is not half as bad as you suppose."

Clide sank into a chair, and waited for his agent to speak.

"Don't you remember telling me to try and purchase the Dane property, valued at £50,000?"

"Yes," replied Clide, in a husky voice; "but almost every farthing that I possessed of cash in the world was in that bank."

"Well," continued the agent, without seeming to hear him, "I have purchased the property, and paid the whole amount one week ago. You will only lose about two thousand pounds."

"Musting!"

Clide had bounded from his seat, and grasping the old lawyer's hand, shook it heartily in silence. So great was his astonishment and joy that he was unable to speak.

"If I had known that the danger was so near at hand, I would have drawn every farthing; but I did not suppose that the crash would come for a couple of months. The news has spread like wildfire, and I heard several eminent gentlemen say that it would ruin you for ever. I think I had better go out and deny those false reports."

Clide did not answer for a moment, then looking up with a smile, he said:

"No, Musting, my dear old friend; I think I will let the world believe me ruined for a few days. It will be a splendid opportunity to test my friends. Don't you think so?"

"Well, no—yes; but do just as you like, my boy—just as you like," said the agent, as he rose from his chair, put on his hat, and after talking to Clide for a few moments, left his office, with a smile on his wrinkled old face, and a brisk step.

"Won't Lilly Seemore be happy when she hears it—happy that she told me plainly that she would never marry a poor man?" mused Clide, as he leaned back in his easy-chair.

"But dark-eyed, beautiful Mabel—to her true woman's heart I will turn for sympathy. I know that she loves me, and when we are married I will tell her the truth. Yes, it is she I love, and not Lilly, the purse-proud heiress. How fortunate it is that I did not make a fool of myself by declaring my love for her, as I would undoubtedly be discarded as soon as she heard of my loss of wealth; and she would accept some rich suitor, while I would become the laughing-stock of her circle. But yet," he added aloud, "I can scarcely drive her sweet face away. She was so beautiful and so winning."

All news always flies fast; and so it was with the intelligence of Clide's ruin. Before evening nearly every one of his friends had heard of his great loss, and it was currently reported that he was totally ruined. Among the number who were first to hear it were Lilly Seemore and Mabel Desota.

Two days passed, and Clide had not left his home. He denied himself to all who called. On the evening of the second day he dressed himself carefully and went out to call on Mabel Desota, and ask her to become his wife and share his poverty.

The servant ushered him into the parlour, and went to find Miss Desota. In a few moments she entered, looking very lovely in a robe of wine-coloured silk. When she saw Clide she held out her little hand, and, smiling sweetly, let him lead her to the sofa. When they were seated, Clide pressed the hand which he held between his own, and leaning over, said,—

"Miss Mabel, you have, I presume, heard of my great loss?"

"Yes, I have heard that you are ruined," she answered, trying to withdraw her hand.

"Mabel, I love you. Will you be my wife and share my poverty?"

She laughed softly, as she pulled her hand away, and trying to avoid his eyes, she said,—

"Mr. Ellings, it is all-nonsense to talk about love and poverty. Don't you remember the old saying, that when poverty flies in at the door love flies out of the window? I never intend to marry a poor man. I have seen and known enough of poverty. If you were rich I would marry you before any one in the world; but since you have become poor, it would be the greatest folly for me to lose the brilliant prospect I have in view by marrying you. Let us part friends."

She rose and held out her hand to Clide, but he did not take it. For a moment he stood looking at her, and then he laughed a low, scornful laugh, and, bowing before the beautiful but heartless woman, he turned and left the room.

When he reached home he found a letter waiting for him from Lilly Seemore, containing the request that he would oblige her by calling at her home for a few moments that evening.

He pressed the note to his lips, for now he knew that it was Lilly that he really loved, and his passion for the heartless music teacher was only a flame that had sprung up in a day and had died out as quickly. He was determined to put his love for Lilly aside, and meet her as a friend.

He had humbled himself to one woman, and he would never leave it in the power of another to refuse him.

Lilly met him the hall, and, after they had entered the parlour, she looked up at him with a timid smile, and a sweet, pleading expression in her blue eyes that touched Clide to the heart.

"Mr. Ellings," she began, in a soft voice, "papa told me yesterday of your great loss. He called to see you both yesterday and to-day, but you were not in, the servant said, and I—I have some ten thousand pounds more than I want, and you will do me a great favour if you will accept the money and pay it back whenever you like. And—oh, Mr. Ellings, I'm so sorry that—"

She held out her right hand toward him, and, covering her eyes with her left hand, she burst into a fit of weeping that was beyond her power to control.

"Oh, Lilly, my darling!"

Clide had caught her in his arms, and was pressing warm kisses on her fair face. With her head pillowed on his breast, he told her of his love for her, and asked her if she would become his bride.

"But remember, my love, that I am poor," he said, as he kissed her flushed cheek.

"I love you, Clide, and it matters not to me whether you are rich or poor. You have all the riches that I desire—a spotless character, and a noble generous heart."

"But, dearest, you said that you would never marry a poor man."

"Oh, Clide, did you not know me better than that? It was not rich in money that I meant—it was rich in having the blessings and gifts of Heaven."

"I was blind, my Lilly, but I am so no longer," he murmured, as he sealed his promise on the sweet lips of his betrothed wife.

In a few weeks they were married, and great was the astonishment of the bride and all of Clide's friends when Lilly was conveyed to a large town house, and told by her happy husband that it was her own—his first gift to her.

When Mabel Desota heard that Clide was still a rich man, and that his reported loss was merely a ruse, she was deeply chagrined, and often repented her own folly in letting such a rare chance slip through her fingers.

In two months after Clide's wedding she married an old man of sixty, who was worth a million, but there is always a look of sorrow on the beautiful face.

Clide Ellings and his lovely wife never regretted the test which mated them for life.

M. K.

## FACETIA.

A GREAT WASTE OF EFFORT.—The child that cries for an hour never gets it.

"Are you looking for any one in particular?" as the rat said when he saw the cat watching for him.

WHEN may a man be strictly said to be in the habit of always "keeping his word?" When nobody will ever take it.

SOMEBODY asked the four-year-old son of a friend what he would do if his father died. "Why," said the youngster, "I'd wear my new boots to the funeral."

"WALTER, is this an old or a new herring that you brought me?" "Can't you tell?" "No." "Well, then, what difference does it make?"

MRS. TOPSAIL (to her little son Bowler): "Don't you know, Bowler, that your father is the mainstay of the family?" Bowler: "Golly! ain't he, though? And he's the spanker, too!"

"My dear," said a wife to her husband, "I shall henceforth call you 'Fire'" "Why, love, will you apply such a peculiar name to me?" asked her husband. "Because you go out generally every night."

AN ADDRESS TO CHARLES II., WHO WAS SO NOTED FOR HIS READY WIT, PRAYED THAT HIS MAJESTY MIGHT LIVE AS LONG AS THE SUN, MOON AND STARS MIGHT ENDURE. "Faith," said the king, "if I do, my successor will have to reign by candle-light."

OUT OF DANGER.—A Paris journal stated that one deputy, condemned to death at Lyons, had attempted suicide, first by poison, and then by the knife; "but," adds the editor, "medical assistance being promptly administered, he is now out of danger, and will tomorrow undergo the sentence of the law."

TWO PICKPOCKETS saw a gentleman receive a large sum at the bank, and followed him for some time to get a chance at it. Finally the watched man turned into a lawyer's office, and one of the watchers said: "That settles it. He's gone. Come along." "No, no!" said the other. "Wait till the lawyer comes out. We'll tackle him!"

A SCROOGE LAD, accused of stealing some articles from a doctor's shop, was asked by the judge why he was guilty of such a contemptible act. "Weel, yo see," replied the boy, "I had a bit pain in my side, and my mither tauld me te gang tae the doctor's and tak' somethin'." "Oh, yes," said the judge. "But surely she didn't tell you to go and take an eight-day clock?" "Well, Judge, yo see, there's an auld proverb that says 'Twa an' the doctor cure a' diseases,' and see I thought—" But the remainder of the reply was lost in the laughter of the audience.

"I HAVE made it a rule," said a busybody at the lunch-table the other day, to the man on his left, "never to meddle with another man's business." "That's right—perfectly right." "But I see you have a new confidential clerk." "Yes, sir—yea." "Hels a hard-looking case. I've seen him drunk a dozen times, and I wouldn't trust him out of my sight with a fraction. Took him out of charity—oh?" "Well, not altogether, you know. He happens to be my oldest son!" Then there was a period of silence so painful that both wished somebody would yell "Fire!"

MR. WHIFFLES: "Doctor, I hear you have a sure cure for insomnia. I wish you would treat me for it, as it almost impossible for me to get to sleep." Doctor: "Certainly. My plan is very simple. As soon as you lie down at night begin to count, and keep on counting until you get to sleep." "Is counting all it is? Why, doctor, counting is just what I do every night of my life, and it doesn't put me to sleep at all." "Eh? What do you count?" "Oh, household expences, unpaid bills, time left on promissory notes, and all sorts of things."

THREE REASONS FOR NOT LENDING.—"Hello, Bill, lend us your penknife!" "I can't—I haven't got any! Besides I want to use it myself."

"I can marry any girl I please," said a young fellow, boastingly. "Very true," replied his waggish companion, "for you can't please any."

"WELL," said an old gentleman, who stumbled as he was trying to make his way around a group of waltzers, "well, this is really working one's passage round the whirled."

BEEPS: "Did you hear Miss Jones's last song?" Brown: "Her last song! Why, when did she die?" Beeps: "Die! She isn't dead." Brown: "Oh! Then you mean her latest song? You should be accurate about these things."

TEACHER (to little girl to whom he is trying to explain subtraction of fractions): "If you had a pie and I should ask you for a quarter of it, and you should give me what I wanted, how much would you have left?" "I wouldn't have any left!" said the little girl.

HOVEL GUEST (the porter on bringing him his boots in the morning): "Michael, how comes it that one of these boots is much larger than the other?" Michael: "I raly don't know, sir; but what bothers me most is that another pair down stairs is in the same fix."

YOUNG WIZZ (at dinner, sobbing): "I think you—you—are just as mean as—an—you be. I made that—that apple dumpling as a pleasant surprise for you, and—and—now—you—want me to bring a handsew to cut it in two with!" Young Husband: "Good Heaven, Maria! Is that a dumpling? I took it for a cocoanut. (With desperate firmness.) I'll eat it now, Maria, if it kills me."

"FOR mercy's sake, John, why is it you stop that clock every night?" "Because I've got an idea. I've come to the conclusion that it's a wicked waste of money to let that clock run all night when it can't do anyone a particle of good. The wear and tear on the works must amount to considerable in the run of a year. I could never save up anything, but I believe I see a way of doing it at last."

"LITTLE NELLIE was in a shop yesterday with her mother, and she was greatly pleased with the array of dolls. 'Mamma,' she said, 'I want a baby.' 'Very well, Nellie,' replied her mother, 'you shall have one;' and Nellie soon had a doll in her arms, but she was not satisfied, and still hung about the doll display. Finally, half in fear and half in hope, she whispered, 'Mamma, I'd like to have twins.'

"I LISTENED yesterday to my own voice in a phonograph," remarked the snake editor this morning, "and I would not have recognised it as my own if I had not known. People do not know what their own voices sound like until they hear them in that wonderful machine." "In that case," remarked the horse editor, "it would be a good idea to make a lot of our public singers sample their own music. It might make them quit."

"WHY MUSTN'T I STAND UP ON THE SEAT?" said a small boy to his mother, in a suburban train the other day. "Because I know you'll fall over and knock Miss Blank's hat off," was the maternal reply. The small boy remained silent for a moment, while he took stock of the hat on the lady in front. Then he said, in judicial tones: "Why, mamma, that's the hat you said you'd knock off Miss Blank's head if you were her mother!"

WEALTHY PHYSICIAN: "I supposed you wished me to look at your hand. I see it is all bound up." Unknown Caller: "No-o, sir; I—I wish to see you about your daughter's hand." "Eh?" "We love each other, sir, and I hope—" "Great Galen! I don't know you. How did you hurt your hand, eh? Get hit with a beer bottle or—" "I cut my hand yesterday while clipping coupons." "Oh! Bless you, my children!"

Feb. 16, 1889.

## SOCIETY.

THERE will be no golden wedding at any European Court during the present year; but, all being well, four silver weddings will be celebrated. May 12 is the twenty-fifth anniversary of the marriage between the Archduke Joseph of Austria, and Princess Clotilde of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha; May 22, of the marriage between Prince George Lohkowitz with Princess Anna of Liechtenstein; May 30, of the marriage between Prince Louis Philippe of Orleans, Count of Paris, with Princess Isabella of Montpensier; and October 15, of the marriage between Prince Louis of Orleans, Count of Eu, with the Crown Princess Isabella of Brazil.

EVERY voice is now praising the Queen of Holland for her unselfish attention to her sick husband. But perhaps she is liked best of all for her spirit of patriotic independence. Not long ago some one recommended to Her Majesty a Wiesbaden sanatorium, saying it was patronised by "all the German royalties." "That would make no difference to me, the Queen of Holland!" replied the Queen, promptly, and with great emphasis.

THE Comte de la Rocheconquied, to whose villa at Biarritz the Queen is going next month, is an Englishwoman, and the sister of Sir Horace Rumbold; and Her Majesty knows by experience how comfortable she can make a house, for it was in this same countess's villa at Baden that Her Majesty stayed in 1878, and enjoyed her visit mightily. The Count, her husband, is of the senior branch of La Rocheconquieds, the eldest son of Count Hippolyte, who was Minister Plenipotentiary at Florence during Louis Philippe's reign. Count Gaston has also been one of the Corps Diplomatique, and was Chief Secretary of Legation at Washington, so that he has learned in America how to have things in luxurious fashion around him; and the Queen is sure of finding the house at Biarritz arranged after her own rather fastidious liking.

ACCORDING to present arrangements, the Royal route will be via Cherbourg, Le Mans, and Bordeaux, and the Biarritz folk are in a fine state of anticipation, especially since they have heard that the Queen's Indian servants are coming with the numerous suite that accompanies her. Queen Christina intends paying an early visit to our Sovereign, and showing her the little King, in whom the English grandmamma is prepared to take a lively interest beforehand.

THE winter season is in full swing at Madrid. But there is rather a sombre undercurrent beneath the universal gaiety in the Spanish capital, for diphtheria has broken out again in that unhealthy city, and the number of its victims is alarmingly on the increase. Not only so, but small-pox has likewise made its appearance there, and poor Christine is very much alarmed for the health of her son in a spot so full of infection as Madrid. Fortunately the little King seems stronger than formerly.

ALL rumours concerning the engagement of the Czarewitch with any princess, German or other (an esteemed correspondent informs us), are for the moment absolutely devoid of foundation, and for the simple reason that the health of the lad will not allow of any matrimonial project being entertained for the present. His Imperial Highness, who is a most lovable and intelligent boy, suffers from a very grave hysteria, similar to that which eventually carried off his uncle, the Czarewitch Nicholas, the eldest son of Alexander II., and the brother of the present Emperor.

MRS. BLAIR, the lady who will return to England as the Duchess of Sutherland, is not, as has been stated, an American lady, but the widow of an Englishman; and the couple used frequently to stay at Trentham and Dunrobin Castle. Her husband, however, died by an accident.

## STATISTICS.

Prior to the war the United States produced about 4,000,000 bales of cotton, while since the abolition of slavery about 7,000,000 bales of cotton, have been produced in a year.

The medical profession does not seem to be so overstocked in Russia as in other countries. There are only eighteen thousand doctors for a population of one hundred millions. About 40 per cent. of the whole population, and 94 per cent. of the very poor, die without having had medical attendance. There are no statistics, however, to show whether on the average a Russian enjoys a longer or shorter life than his neighbours who are more amply supplied with medical advisers.

ALPHABETS.—The Sandwich Island alphabet has only twelve letters: the Burmese, nineteen; the Italian, twenty; the Bengalese, twenty-one; the Hebrew, Syrian, Chaldee, Samaritan, and Latin, twenty-two each; the French, twenty-three; the Greek, twenty-four; the German and Dutch, twenty-six each; the Spanish and Slavonic, twenty-seven each. But, on the other hand, the Arabic has twenty-eight; the Persian and Coptic, thirty-two; the Georgian, thirty-five; the Armenian, thirty-eight; the Russian, forty-one; the Muscovite, forty-three; the Sanscrit and Japanese, fifty; the Ethiopic and Tartaric, two hundred and two.

## GEMS.

EVERY heart has its secret sorrow which the world knows not, and oftentimes we call a man cold when he is only sad.

It is not by attending to our friends in our way, but in theirs, that we can really avail them.

The light of friendship is the light of phosphorus—seen plainest when all around is dark.

EASE must be impracticable to the envious; they lie under a double misfortune; common calamities and common blessings fall heavily upon them.

THERE is no talent so pernicious as eloquence, to those who have it not under command; women, who are so liberally gifted by nature in this particular, ought to study the rules of female oratory.

## HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

GERMAN PUFFS.—Two cups of sweet milk, two cups of flour, three eggs, and a pinch of salt. Mix well and bake quick.

DRIED PRESERVES.—Any fruit which has been preserved in syrup may be drained from the syrup, dried slowly, sprinkled with powdered sugar, and packed neatly in boxes.

CARROT BEETS.—Cut three or four boiled beets into pieces the size of a grain of corn. Place in stew-pan; to one pint of cut beets add one cup of rice, sweet milk, a piece of butter the size of a walnut, or small egg. Salt and pepper to season. Stew ten minutes, and serve hot.

POTATOES AND EGGS.—Put a lump of butter into a frying-pan; when it boils brown in it a finely-chopped small onion. Cut some cold boiled potatoes into slices, put them in the pan, pour over them the well-beaten yolks of two eggs, seasoned with pepper and salt; fry a nice golden brown on both sides.

ORANGE FLOAT.—One quart of water, the juice and pulp of two lemons, one coffee-cup of sugar. When boiling hot add four table-spoonfuls of cornflour. Let boil fifteen minutes, stirring all the time. When cold pour it over four or five oranges that have been sliced into a glass dish, and over the top spread the beaten whites of three eggs, sweetened and flavoured with vanilla.

## MISCELLANEOUS.

THE smoke-cloud, which daily hangs over London is estimated by Prof. Chandler Roberts to contain about fifty tons of solid carbon, and two hundred and fifty tons of carbon in gaseous combinations. The expense of this waste of coal is calculated at £2,600,000 a year, while the smoky atmosphere causes damage to property which Mr. Edwin Chadwick places at two million sterling per annum.

In all right courses of life a man resolutely desirous of becoming a wiser, a better informed, better disciplined, more useful individual, will find his thoughts, both of the end and the way, get clearer as he proceeds in his work. He sees more truly and more brightly what it is he wants; he sees more fully the means for its attainment; and with better prospect both of the end and the way, there comes increased motive for the self-improving effort of the journey.

It is said that the number of artificial teeth made in America last year by three of the largest business houses engaged in the trade was nearly twenty millions, and this was not more than half the natural product of the country. One peculiar feature of the business is that the houses which do the most extensive export trade are obliged to prepare teeth of different colours for different countries. In Canada, for instance, the demand is for molars as white as snow, while in South America no such teeth could be sold. There they require teeth that are almost yellow, and the trade from China, which is a lucrative one, is for nothing but black teeth.

An interesting feature of the Paris Exhibition of next year will be a group of forty-nine structures intended to give a history of the human dwelling. The different types of dwellings represented will include those of the prehistoric period—under rocks, in caves, on water and on land; and in later times those of early historic civilisation, of Aryan civilisation, of Roman civilisation in the East and in the West, and of rude civilisations disconnected from the general progress of humanity—such as the Chinese, Japanese, Esquimaux, African, Aztec, &c. The interiors and surroundings will be those of the different epochs studied, and it is intended to people the dwellings with figures in representative costumes.

"PUSS."—Why do we call the cat puss? A great many years ago the people of Egypt worshipped the cat. They thought the cat was like the moon, because she was more active at night, and because her eyes change just as the moon changes, which is sometimes full and sometimes a bright little crescent, or half moon, as we say. Did you ever notice puss's eyes to see how they change? So these people made an idol with a cat's head, and named it Raht, the same name they give to the moon; for the word means the face of the moon. That word has been changed to pas or puss, the name which almost every one gives to the cat. Pussy and pussycat are pet names for kitty everywhere. But few people know that it was given to her thousands of years ago.

A VENETIAN WEDDING DAY.—A Venetian festival is a synonym of all that is magnificent and romantic. From the earliest history the fêtes have been events of the greatest popular interest and importance. They have been celebrated most frequently to perpetuate the memory of some triumph of the Venetian army, and the patriotism of the people has been kept alive by these fêtes quite as much as by the consciousness of commercial importance and power. For centuries the Marian festivals were the most important holidays of the year. It was a custom introduced early in the tenth century to select from the different parishes of the city twelve poor maidens, distinguished for virtue and beauty, who were provided with a dowry at the cost of the State, and fitted out with wedding trousseaus from the treasury of St. Mark.

## NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

—o—

C. H.—Thursday, April 23, 1888.

G. H. P.—Please say the colour you wish the stain—brown or blue, and we will try and oblige you.

NIL DESPERANDUM.—We should counsel you to study the works of the great poets before attempting to commit your thoughts to rhyme.

M. M.—Salt Lake, Utah, is 75 miles long from northwest to south-east, and about 30 miles wide. Its surface is 4,800 feet above the level of the sea.

JENNY.—1. You were certainly indiscreet in accepting the invitation. Your sister was right. 2. Your handwriting is quite pretty.

W. D.—Dressmaking can be learned by receiving instructions from someone who thoroughly understands the business.

VIOLET DAIRY Y. O.—1. Merely to bow in all that is necessary, but there is no harm in shaking hands. 2. It is not only your duty, but strict etiquette to speak first if you meet him again.

W. V. H.—An excellent remedy for tetter is said to be one ounce of sulphuret of potash dissolved in one quart of cold soft water. Put into a bottle and keep it tightly corked. Bathe the eruption five or six times a day with a sponge dipped in this solution.

LOVER OF THE "LONDON READER"—1. The young man has probably nothing more than a brotherly affection for either of the young ladies. If he he will soon show it. If he takes both out he should certainly pay all expenses. 2. Sugar, unless taken in great excess, is not injurious. 3. Fair.

TOM.—The best sympathetic inks are said to be a solution of chloride or nitro-muriate of cobalt turns green when heated, and disappears on cooling; a dilute solution of chloride of copper becomes a fine yellow; and a solution of acetate of cobalt, with a little nitrate added to it, turns rose-coloured by heat, and like the two others disappears on cooling.

F. M. N.—The black Poland chicken, instead of a comb, has the head covered with feathers, which sometimes form a crest overhanging the eyes. There are also white, silver, or golden Polands, according to the general colour. All varieties with topknots are called Polands by the English. Besides being very ornamental, they are excellent layers, but disinclined to sit.

M. T.—For the cure of drunkenness the following recipe has been found efficacious in a great many cases: Sulphate of iron, five grains; peppermint water, eleven drachms; spirits of nutmeg, one drachm. Take in quantities equal to an ordinary drachm, and as often as a desire for a dram returns. This preparation partially supplies the place of liquor, and prevents the prostration that follows the sudden breaking up of temperate habits.

W. S. S.—Were it not for the fact that we always have an eye for the benefit of our readers, we would not scruple to furnish a recipe for compounding a hair-bloaching liquid; but as all such mixtures are composed of materials that act very injuriously on the hair, we decline furnishing such information. If you persist in carrying out the foolish notion it would be best to make application to a local chemist for such a preparation, and after the hair has been irretrievably ruined, repeat at leisure the folly of the undertaking.

R. S. W.—A moderate flow of tears is not injurious to the eyes; on the contrary, tears are sometimes very useful, as they carry off any dust or other matter which may have got into the eyes, but excessive weeping irritates and weakens them. Far-sighted person wear convex, and the near-sighted concave glasses. Old people are generally too far-sighted, because the humour of the eye dry up by age, so that the lenses become flattened. For the same reason, it is stated, the eyes of near-sighted persons become better as they grow older.

JERRY.—To make a cocoanut pound cake, take one pound of sugar, three-quarters of a pound of butter, ten eggs, one pound of flour, one pound of grated cocoanut, half a wineglass of rose water, and one grated nutmeg. Beat the butter and sugar very light; then stir in the rose water, and beat in one-fourth of the flour. Whisk the eggs until very thick, which stir in by degrees. Then add the remaining flour, half at a time, and lastly the cocoanut. Mix all well together, butter and paper the pan, put in the batter, smooth it over evenly with a knife, and bake in a moderate oven.

J. H. H.—To tan the skins of the sheep, wolf, fox, or other smaller animals, observe the following directions: If the skins are dry, soak them in water slightly salted until they are as soft as when green. Then scrape off the flesh with a knife with a smooth, round edge. Sheepskins should be washed clean with soft-soap and water, and thoroughly rinsed. Dissolve in one quart of hot water four ounces of alum and half an ounce of borax; when cool enough to bear the hand, stir in sufficient rye-meal, mixed with half an ounce of Spanish whiting, to make a thick paste. This will make paste enough for a sheepskin. For smaller skins, smaller quantities will be needed. Spread the paste thoroughly over every part of the flesh side of the skin, which should be folded together lengthwise, wool or fur side out, and left two weeks in an airy place. Then remove the paste, wash and dry the skin. When not quite dry, it must be worked and pulled and scraped with a knife made for the purpose and shaped like a chopping-knife, or with a piece of hard wood made with a sharp edge. The more the skin is worked and scraped as it dries, the more pliable it will be.

A. B. BROMLEY.—We see no reason why you should not write him as you propose.

C. H. C.—Almost any kind of gem-ring may be given as an engagement ring. Emeralds and diamonds have the preference. It should certainly not be a keeper-ring.

W. V.—An ordinary marriage license costs £2 2s. 6d. The cost of marriage by banns varies, but it is generally less than a sovereign.

E. D. S.—In the ceremony referred to, the gentleman, if we understand your question aright, should step backwards from the lady.

AMY.—When introducing a person, always rise to your feet, and the other parties to the introduction must follow your example. This is no more than common courtesy.

AN ACTRESS.—There is no known successful agent for removing wrinkles except a happy disposition and absence of care, worry, and all anxiety. The preparations sold for the purpose are usually trash.

E. N.—A thoroughbred horse, technically speaking, is one whose pedigree can be traced to oriental ancestors; but a different rule has been adopted in some cases, and a horse is now stated, by some authorities, as a thoroughbred who has five crosses of pure blood.

E. R.—No definite knowledge of the fate of the kidnapped boy, Charlie Ross, has ever been gained by anyone. There seems no doubt for the statement that he was murdered by his captors when their game of black-mail proved futile.

L. S. K.—Chalcodon, an ancient town of Asia Minor, on the Bosphorus, opposite Constantinople, and near the modern town of Sentar, was called "The City of the Blind" because the colonists who settled there overlooked the admirable site directly opposite where Byzantium was founded about twenty years later.

## AT THE BALL.

I saw a beauty at a ball,  
The fairest dancer of them all,  
In form so graceful, lithe and tall,  
And with so sweet a smile  
It made my heart with rapture reel,  
And o'er my senses quickly steal  
A passion I could not conceal  
Just for a little while.

But in her triumph o'er the crowd  
She grew imperious and proud,  
So stately, cold and haughty-browed,  
Her presence chilled my heart,  
Then turned I, sorrowing and hurt,  
And whispered, "She is rude and pert;  
I'll never woo a thoughtless flirt,  
Or fall before her heart."

But one I knew, who was not there,  
Seemed now to grow more sweet and fair,  
As from the ball-room's hated air  
I hastened to her side.  
And in the little parlour bright,  
With her dear face and eyes of light,  
Heard her sweet self that very night  
Say, I will be your bride!

W. B. D.

F. F. T.—To treat burns and discolorations caused by gunpowder, smear the scorched surface with glycerine by means of a feather, and then apply cotton wadding; lastly, cover with oil of silk. Renew the applications every night on retiring to bed. This is the only remedy we know of.

F. F.—Arithmetical problems and catch questions of any description are not of general interest to our readers, and occupy too much space that can be utilized in answering questions of greater importance. Occupy some of your spare time in working out the problem, or refer it to some friend who has both inclination and time to spare in solving it.

W. N.—A careful reading of your communication, and comparison with a department in a periodical devoted to answering queries of all kinds, develops the fact that all your questions are contained in a list for which the publishers of that paper offer a number of prizes. Their idea in opening such a competition was to excite in the minds of readers to personally ascertain the answers to the many questions propounded, and not to refer them to those professionally engaged in such work. This is not fair to yourself, the party offering the prizes, or the one to whom the queries are referred, and consequently we respectfully decline to aid anyone in such an undertaking.

H. S.—1. No woman who has a tender, affectionate heart, good health, a fairly cultured mind, and the graces of ladyhood—and we feel sure you are wanting in none of these—need ever despair of finding, at one time or another, a husband exactly suited to her tastes. Some poor souls lose their womanly delicacy so early that we should call them "old maids" before they have emerged from their teens, while others on the shady side of thirty are meanwhile maturing into the full bloom and wealth of true womanhood. It is self-evident, therefore, that no set time can be assigned for one becoming an "old maid." 2. Too many marriages are made for the sole purpose of adding "Mrs." to the lady's name and to gratify the desire of becoming the head of her own household, and as a natural consequence unhappiness reigns supreme. If a firm basis of affection does not exist, harmony and confidence soon give place to fretfulness and discord, and in many cases both parties vainly regret a bargain that has proved so irksome.

MIGNONETTE.—1. The lady would be a blonde, 2. Rather slovenly but fair style.

ETHEL.—It is wrong to go out with him unless your parents know of the matter, as you are far too young to think of lovers and marriage.

R.—Give a little more time under the circumstances, and then sue. The statute of limitations does not apply till six years after the debt was contracted.

W. W. S.—It would take a person of your age, with daily practice and fair ability, a couple of years to become a tolerably good performer on the piano.

FANNY.—Certainly, a lady can start a day school in a private house without a license, unless there is a provision against it in the lease or agreement, in which case the permission of the landlord must be obtained.

M. S.—You have acted a mean part in making mischievous between your two friends. Neither can repress any confidence in you in the future, and we do not wonder that one of them spoke so sharply to you.

R. S.—It was unkind, not to say malicious, on the part of your sister to act in the way she did. The wisest plan would be to treat the matter with silent contempt. She will soon leave off teasing you if you take no notice. Remember it takes two people to make a quarrel.

G. G.—1. There are various remedies for the troubles of which you complain, but if in your case they are of long standing, we advise you to consult an experienced physician. 2. Yellow dock root and sarsaparilla are excellent blood purifiers. Most chemists keep preparations of them.

W. H. E.—Ee-ther is the pronunciation given in nearly all the English dictionaries, but eye-ther has of late become somewhat common. The best and most general usage is decidedly in favour of the latter. The best speakers in England pronounce the word "neither" as it is spelled ny-ther. En-vel-ope, not on-velop, or on-vel-ope; natural, natch-u-ral; only, own-lee.

W. R.—The composition of the various kinds of liquid bronze is a secret known only to the manufacturers. A gentleman of our acquaintance, who makes a very superior article of the kind, informs us that he spent five years in experimenting before he was able to produce the compound, and therefore considers he has a perfect right to keep inviolable the formula that cost so much mental and manual labour—an opinion doubtless held by others in the same line of business.

M. N. X.—Mestizo is a Spanish-American term for the mixed offspring of Europeans and Indians. Mestizos are very numerous in Mexico, Peru, and Brazil. Their colour is described as almost a pure white, with a skin of remarkable transparency. The chief indications of the mixture of Indian blood, it is stated, are a thin beard, small hands and feet, and an obliquity of the eyes. The women of this race are called mestizas, and the offspring of their marriage with whites differ but slightly from pure Europeans.

G. R. D.—Mrs. Frances Hodgson Burnett, the novelist, was born in Manchester. Her father—Edwin Hodgson—was a well-to-do merchant, and her mother the daughter of a cotton manufacturer, named William Boond. The family consisted of two boys—Herbert and John—and three girls—Frances, Edith and Edwin. Frances' first literary effort was written at the age of seven. It was a poem entitled "Church Bells," and was immediately destroyed. Her first story was "Frank Hillsworth; or, Bachelor Buttons," the history of a woman-hater whose end was a total and abject enslavement to some attractive member of the despised sex. The first stories written by this lady in America were published in "Godey's Magazine" in June and October, 1858, and bore the respective titles of "Hearts and Diamonds" and "Miss Carruthers' Engagement." The price paid for both was seven pence. On September 17, 1873, she was married to Dr. Swan M. Burnett, a practising physician of Knoxville, U.S. Very little of her poetry has been published; the principal poems are "Yesterday and To-day," one read at the Garfield Memorial of the "Literary Society" in Washington, and "A Woman's Reason." The lines quoted by you are found in the latter, but your memory has proved rather treacherous, as they read thus:

"And now my hand clings closer to your breast;  
Bend your head lower while I say the rest—  
The greatest change of all is this—that I  
Who used to be so cold, so fierce, so aby,  
In the sweet moment that I feel you near,  
Forget to be ashamed and know no fear—  
Forget that life is sad and death is drear—  
Because—because I love you."

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